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SANTA'S GROTTY

SPECIAL ROLLOVER XMAS/NEW YEAR ISSUE

EYE CROSSWORD 173

by Cyclops

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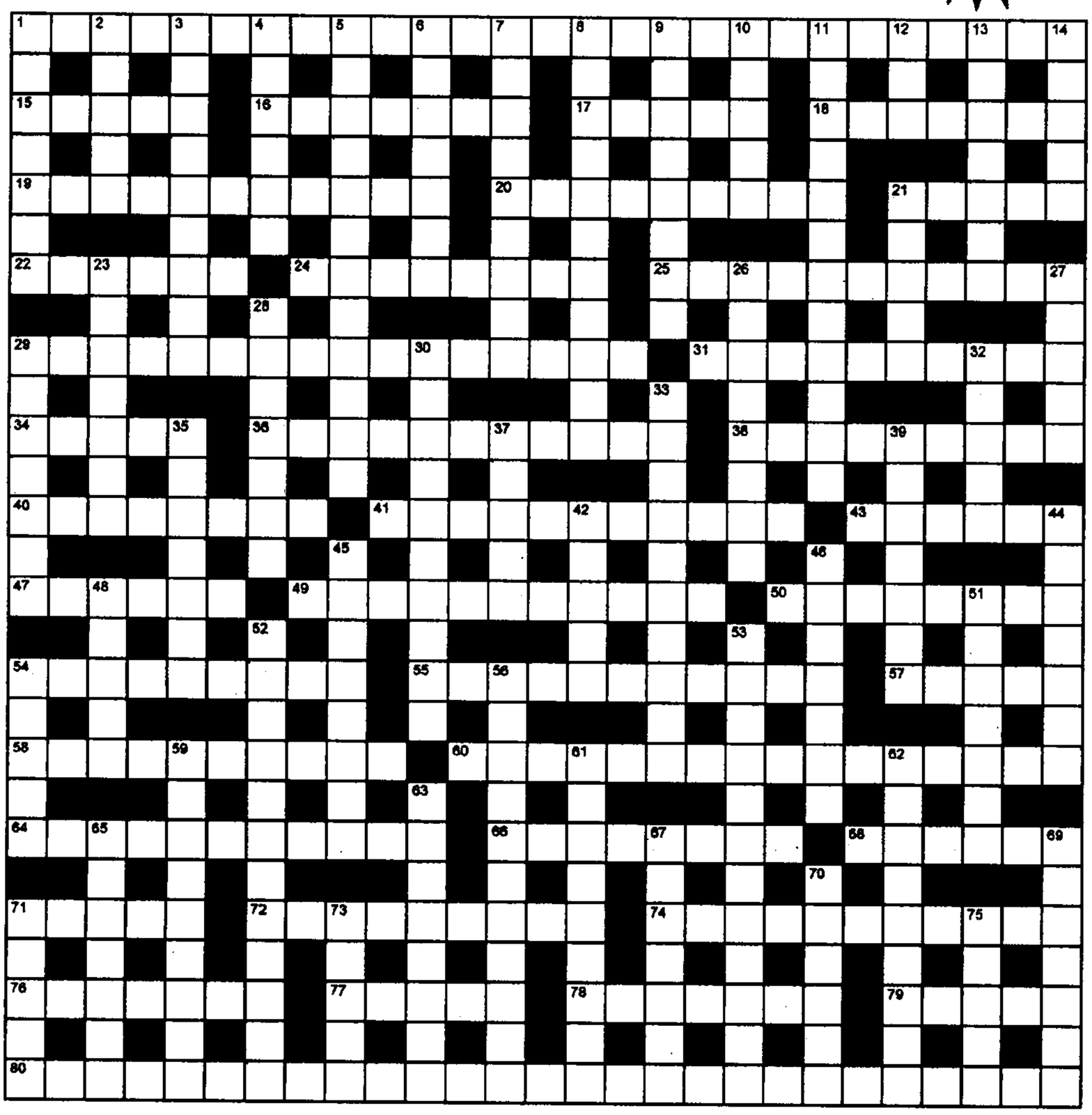

ACROSS

1 As the NF member vocalises his fantasy for the present time (2,8,2,1,5,9)
15 However retiring, Brenda displays a fleshy bit (5)
16 Book more than one drug (7)
17 Relish thus half in and half out of pot (5)
18 Arseholes rule; it's perversely inevitable (4,3)
19 Giving awfully nice head, Monica's first up – unlike Clinton (11)
20 Advances and keeps grabbing Brenda (9)
21 Consummate, say? (5)
22 In need of having an erection repeatedly (4,2)
24 One needs long distance to ring Becks, mostly – moron! (8)
25 One whose sexual needs are also accommodated? (4-2,5)
29 Gore disposition? Obstinacy (6-10)
31 A little tense, having penetrated excited Santa, I'd be off (2,3,5)
34 Blow job recipient permit (5)
36 Mensa member hurt youth – goes in for heavy breathing (6-5)
38 As a corporation, pisspoor Beeb really lacks one (4,5)
40 Bust forms some mountain there, dear! (2,3,3)
41 Bared hernia, coming out in rash (4-7)
43 Berlin type of investment gains interest with a sigh of relief (6)
47 One who feels good nuzzling up to cowboy? (6)
49 Wogan and Ian tangled sometimes! (3,3,5)
50 Harmony's wrecked when Conservative leader intervenes, as a rule (8)
54 Knock off, snog at a furious rate (9)
55 "No follower of Marx gets serial PMT," I repeated (11)
57 It's a luvvie thing to drive home between December and April (5)
58 So don't appear before magistrate with stomach irritant (5,5)
60 Symbolic kiss with possibly oral pumping (5-12)
64 Pointless nominal penis surgery here (11)
66 Kelvin nabbed by agog audience and exposed (8)
68 Royal family's surprise – recruiting Posh (6)
71 Brown-noses Brown to a point (5)
72 Getting cleaned up is when a shit cracked (2,3,4)
74 Huge Nelly gets in key (11)
76 Somersaulting, I mount round behind, giving a big wave (7)
77 A long snog first, dearest? (5)
78 Price enters soft, pliant Candy (7)
79 It transparently sticks out (5)
80 Crack climax to intercourse between player and roving piece (2,3,7,4,2,3,6)

DOWN

1 Communicating badly, chin out (2,5)
2 Here is what Brenda will do nominally with the introduction of semen (5)
3 Raze development in front of tramp poet (4,5)
4 Jealous brother with one minute, inverted nut (6)
5 Riled company man: "Hi, here's an excessive union-lover" (12)
6 Periodically late and unsettled (7)
7 Fool Brenda into changing claim (9)
8 Pissed? Time to think of plotting to oust Brenda! (4,7)
9 Hitler's sole seed producer? (8)
10 C only – Dolly ...? (5)
11 ... tits a seducer twiddled and gave a revitalising kiss? (12)
12 How most of us feel when lawyers get a rise? (3)
13 Maureen meets fate with oxygen and very volatile cocktail! (7)
14 Needle-user's filth channel (5)
21 Not enlightened by topless tabloid student sex (5)
23 Old legislation from out-of-control party – Bill wants Tony's head (4,3)
26 No choice for top management job among even able seamen (8)
27 Shrill-voiced Stalky (5)
28 Dish – Sky's first pap-producer? (7)
29 Installing tap – or trying (7)
30 Auntie has scrapped Anthea's opening – it makes the going easier (10)
32 Jewish guy gets it up for the maestro (5)
33 Fit in with tacky *Times* alias (10)
35 Male (bachelor) going into wood, gives head (3,4)
37 Listener's issued a writ – sham! (5)
39 Villain gets off hugging celebrity (7)
42 Jolly flier – shag? (5)
44 Constable's work making heroin bust in a way? (3,4)
45 Manhattan member and dog (8)
46 Flirting with dogs – old political leader's that is (7)
48 The final development: in-Dome garage (5)
51 Alexandra was the last to enter saloon in one (7)
52 Choleric pain treatment for one with unresponsive sex partner (12)
53 Flipping short bloke's rubbing against Unity in the row (12)
54 Report in which Scottish leader makes boobs (5)
56 Kick bucket to sailor with the French fruit and veg (11)
59 Sun lacks influence here, though profoundly affecting Gap (4,5)
61 Stupid git has pet food (9)
62 TV presenter, tear-inducer, with one director (9)
63 Unlikely to be inflamed, like, by boozy has-been (rather large) (8)
65 Recent habit of Virgin, taking legal action (3,4)
67 What Di liked to do: persist with tantrum (4,3)
69 Lech indiscriminately, knock around and this could result (3,4)
70 Pure heroin's in order (6)
71 Some disbelief at warrant – a death one? (5)
73 Drunk, get up to put balls away again (5)
75 Murdoch has hot temper (5)

£250 prize to first solution opened on 5.1.01
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Solution to Crossword No. 172

Winner: G. DE BARRA

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DOWN: 1 Cocaine 2 Editorial 3/17 Safe cracker 4 Ashdown 5 Papyrus 6 Tumescence 8 Conquer 13 Jingoistic 18 Eyeball 19 Recycle 20 Syringe 22 Sapid 24 Nowt.

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HUNTSWOOD

Gnome

IN every competition there have to be winners and losers and I would be the last to gloat at the abject failure of my rival, Sir Richard Beardie, to steal the Lottery from Gnomelot.

Lord Burns is to be praised for his wisdom in awarding the contract to Gnomelot for another 100 years, recognising our achievement in creating many more millionaires than Sir Beardie could ever hope to do.

They include not only myself, but Mr Strobes, and Ms Rita Chevrolet, a senior director of the company. In fact, we have all hit the jackpot this week and, in recognition of our hard work, we will all be receiving a special £80 million Christmas bonus.

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"The Government says it's essential but I think they're doing it just for fun"

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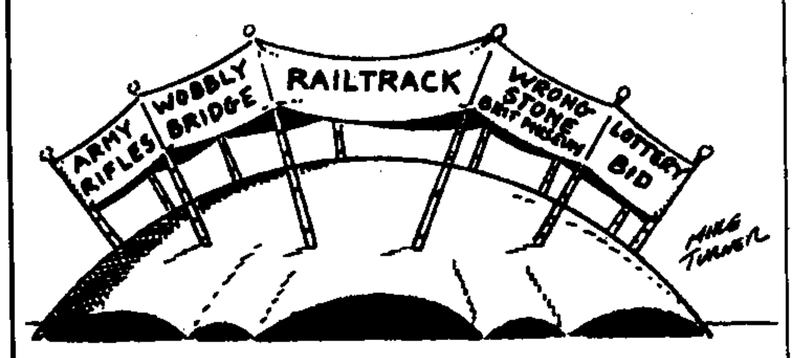


Chamber of Millennium Year Horrors

ON 12 December, following a leak to a local radio station, Vauxhall announced that it was closing its Luton plant with the loss of 2,000 jobs. In typical Blair Babe style, local MP Margaret Moran wrung her hands and declared herself "stunned" by the news.

As indeed she was. In the 30 November issue of a local free newspaper, the *Herald & Post*, Luton South's Tory candidate Gordon Henderson expressed his fears for Vauxhall's future: "If the trend away from larger cars continues, the outlook for the Luton plant will become increasingly problematic," he warned. Vauxhall, tellingly enough, refused to comment; but Margaret Moran was happy to wade in. "Mr Henderson has lost the plot on this one," she raved. "There is no threat to the plant."

Like the hapless Moron, senior ministers are deeply embarrassed by the debacle – not least because of their own cosy relationship with Vauxhall boss Nick Reilly, who has become a quintessential "new" Labour quangocrat and is held up as proof that captains of industry can be decent, sharing, caring, socially conscious, etc, etc.

Reilly is chairman of the Training and Skills Council, and was recently chosen to chair the Adult Learning Inspectorate, a new quango which starts life next April. Though some education professionals protested at Reilly's lack of experience in the field, David Blunkett insisted he was a great catch.

Most embarrassed of all is John Prescott, who attacked Reilly in the Commons for letting his employees learn of their fate via a local radio station – but omitted to mention that Nick Reilly is also a member of, er, John Prescott's integrated transport commission. When the appointment was announced, some cynics wondered if the UK's second-biggest car manufacturer was really likely to challenge the road lobby, but Prescott stoutly maintained that the Vauxhall chief was a man of vision and integrity.

And this is how he repays his "new" Labour chums: sacking thousands of workers two days before they start their Christmas holiday! If Prescott has any say in it, there will be no more quangos for Reilly; and no peerage either.

DUMB BRITAIN

— AT CHRISTMAS —

This Morning, ITV

Judy Finnegan: What did the Three Wise Men bring baby Jesus?

Contestant: Gold, platinum and silver.

THE task of finding a prominent black figure to defend Conservative party leaders is not easy at the best of times. But in the wake of William Hague's criticism of aspects of the Macpherson report and the furious response of the parents of murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence, the job must have been near impossible.

Step forward Derek Laud, Britain's first black Master of Foxhounds, who on Monday 18 December – before Hague made an even bigger twit of himself – was enticed on to the *Today* programme.

When questioned, Laud pronounced himself "detached" by the approach adopted by his leader, and for good measure took a sideswipe at the advice and some of the (unnamed) advisers working for Hague. But his conciliatory, even "touchy feely" approach to race relations and Hague's clumsy intervention which has enraged the black community, does not sit easily with his earlier incarnation as an anti-immigration campaigner.

For what the *Today* programme neglected to mention was that Laud enjoys singular fame as the first black member of the right-wing Monday Club, and the first secretary of the club's race, repatriation and immigration committee.

In 1997 the keen country sportsman and anti-immigration campaigner was obliged to stand down as the Tory candidate for Tottenham after being charged for drink driving in the United States. On being apprehended he boldly announced that he "could not take his chauffeur everywhere".

RESIDENTS of Peckham, as they struggle to come to terms with the killing of a 10-year-old on their doorstep, are not entirely thrilled with the recent performance of their MP, Harriet Harman.

Since the start of December "Hands-on Hattie" has not improved her relations with the local community by cutting the number of surgeries she holds every month from five to three. While previously she visited four of the borough's poorest council estates each month, from now on she will hold court in the town hall. There are, of course, parts of Peckham one would rather avoid, but if one is going to accuse the Tories of playing political football with this issue, one will just have to try harder.

CURFEWS for troublesome 10 year olds are not the only "new" Labour law and order gimmick to have been completely ignored.

After the government admitted that not one single curfew had been implemented since the powers against tearaway children were introduced two years ago, the probation officers' union Napo has discovered that, even with more than 1.3m people being convicted by the courts every year, no burglar has yet been jailed for a minimum of three years under the government's three-strikes-and-you're-out, court powers legislation that was introduced a year ago.

Similarly, only four serious drug traffickers have been jailed for the supposed minimum of seven years. And in the 18 months since sex offenders were required to register with police if their behaviour in public caused concern but fell short of an offence, only 40 sex offender orders have been made.

The much-heralded anti-social behaviour legislation against nasty neighbours, which has also been on the statute books for 18 months, has been a damp squib too. It has attracted only 140 orders: less than one a year per local authority or police force.

- *£250 Crossword* 2
- *Bores of the Year* ..... 20 &21
- *Gnomemart* ..... 22 & 23
- *Slicker & Equitable Life* 28

"We brought the presents because you can't trust the post"

NEWS

IF YOU think a company is setting up a monopoly or cartel, you can always complain to the competition commission or to the office of fair trading (OFT).

The 700 workers employed by Biwater to make giant pipes at Clay Cross, Derbyshire, definitely thought they were the victims of a cartel when their firm was gobbled up recently by the huge French combine Saint Gobain. The workers were given a clue as to the intentions of the new company when Saint Gobain announced its plans to close down the works and sack all the workers. The object was, in short, to remove competition not strengthen it.

Through their MP Harry Barnes, the workers tried to get the trade and industry secretary Stephen Byers to refer this scam to the competition commission, which has powers to stop mergers which damage competition. Byers refused. In his interpretation of the "third way", it is better that 700 workers should be sacked than the government should be seen to be standing in the way of a big European multinational. Now almost the entire workforce has been sacked and the assets and business have been parcelled off to Saint Gobain subsidiaries all over the world.

Fact to remember: Saint Gobain has already taken over Guest & Chrimes of Rotherham... stripped its assets and closed it down. The same fate awaits the Italian pipe manufacturer Tubi Ghaisi, now owned by Saint Gobain. In 1999 Saint Gobain took over the German manufacturer Thyssen (SG already owns an alternative German manufacturer, Halberg).

The whole story would make a good subject for investigation by the BBC's *File on Four* or even *Newsnight* or *Panorama*, especially as Adrian White, the big boss of Biwater, is a governor of the BBC.

THERE was an unfamiliar fall in profits for shareholders of Kelda (formerly known as Yorkshire Water) in the company's six-monthly figures to the end of September.

Chairman John Napier predictably blamed the drop in pre-tax profits from £122m the year before to £81m on Ofwat's "punitive" price controls, rather than on the time, money and energy wasted on the company's ill-fated "mutual" scheme *(Eyes passim)*.

But shareholders can rest assured that they still come first. While turnover and profits both show a marked downturn, dividends per share have actually gone *up* from 7.3p to 7.5p, all of which is paid for by the Yorkshire Water side of the business – ie long-suffering water customers.

Next year's balance sheet will also be affected by the company's latest appearance in court in December. After admitting supplying drinking water "the colour of coffee", Yorkshire Water was fined £119,000 and ordered by Leeds crown court to pay £125,000 costs. Judge Norman Jones said: "Water is the lifeblood of humanity and when people see black gunge coming out of the tap it is very disturbing."

POOR old Beardie. Not only did Sir Richard Branson fail to win the lottery shortly before Christmas, but the skids appeared to be under his airline subsidiary Virgin Express's Irish operations in Shannon.

Last April Virgin Express launched a daily service between Gatwick and Shannon, the gimmick being that "all persons whose last name is Ryan, fly for free..." The idea was to finish off Ryanair. But things don't seem to be going to plan.

By August the *Irish Examiner* was reporting that "Virgin Express says Shannon operation will not be axed despite losses." Virgin Express Ireland director Martin Hamrogue responded: "A newspaper report suggesting that the airline may pull out of Ireland is totally without foundation."

Alas, the story is now slightly different. As the *Irish Examiner* reports: "Virgin Express Ireland, the low cost airline subsidiary, have confirmed that unless they find a suitable investor for its Irish operation by mid-January, daily services to London Gatwick and Brussels from Shannon will cease."

Oddly there was no mention of this on Virgin's website and nor did the firm put out a press release to explain. Presumably Virgin Express's bankers know what's going on though.

Street of Shame

WITH a general election imminent, *Express* political hacks may wish to know how their new boss Richard Desmond likes to cover these events.

On the night of 1 May 1997, as the Dimbleby brothers held court on the BBC and ITV, Desmond's Television X channel also had a polling-night special. Instead of the Swingometer, its set was dominated by three 10-foot penises marked Lab, Lib and Con, with notches all the way up to show how close each party was to an orgasmic overall majority.

Erection Night (geddit?!) was hosted by former *Penthouse* editor Deric Botham, assisted by two scantily-clad slappers (*shurely "leggy lovelies?" Ed.*) who lay on a bed taking phone calls from masturbating viewers while inserting bananas in various orifices.

Botham read out results and adjusted the markers on the penises from time to time, but the serious discussion was left to the slappers and their panting chums. While David Dimbleby sought expert opinion from Professor Anthony King on BBC1, Desmond's channel celebrated the new political dawn with another Tony, a first-time caller from London:

Slapper: "Right, Tony, I'm gonna pull these panties right up... can you see that? Then I'm gonna pop 'em in an envelope and send 'em to you...

This discussion continued for a short while before the caller broke it off.

Caller: "Eeeuuurgh! Ooh-er, I've just come..."

And so, just like so many candidates in the election, another wanker lost his deposit.

WHILE the *Daily Mail* exhorts its "family" of readers to give a wide berth to Dirty Desmond's *Sexpress*, one aged relative has been quick to sign up with the pornographer. Soon after the takeover, former *Mail on Sunday* editor Jonathan Holborow scuttled off to Ludgate House to offer his services to Dirty Des and his Rasputin-like editorial director, Paul "I-don't-know-anything-about-newspapers" Ashford.

Holborow was ousted from the *MoS* two years ago, within weeks of the death of his protector Sir David English, after editor-in-chief Paul Dacre pointedly informed the new Lord Rothermere of Holborow's many journalistic shortcomings. A ludicrously generous payoff of £750,000 failed to assuage his bitterness: hence his craven approaches to Desmond for a lead role in the Ludgate House Follies.

Holborow was apparently ready to step into the breach as soon as Rosie Boycott decided she had had enough of working for a loutish porn-baron. But there was a small problem: since his departure from Northcliffe House, Holborow has been working for various right-wing think-tanks and getting friendly with William Hague and Ann Widdecombe – associations unlikely to endear him to Desmond, whose view of Hague as a "tosser" has been widely and accurately reported.

Nevertheless, even Dirty Des can see that figleafs have their uses. He has now announced that Holborow is one of the "influential grandees" (*sic*) who will "guarantee the editorial independence of the *Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express* and the *Daily Star*".

It remains to be seen how Holborow will repay Desmond's generosity. Can we soon look forward to an *OK!* spread inside the delightful Kent mansion which he bought with his Associated payoff?

DESPITE its well known political allegiance, the *Daily Mail* clearly has no objection to Stalinist personality cults.

Shortly before Christmas workmen installed two large marble plinths in the front atrium of the *Mail* office in Derry Street, either side of the main escalator. *Mail* hacks will therefore have to pass them every day on their way into work.

And what will go on the plinths? Huge statues of Sir David "Festering Lie" English and the equally late Lord "Viagra" Rothermere!

WHEN *Express* hack Peter Oborne wrote a stinging personal denunciation of those involved in the Slickergate scandal at the *Daily Mirror*, he dumped first on obvious criminals like editor Piers Morgan and City hacks Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell, but reserved most contempt for Trinity Mirror chairman Sir Victor Blank.

Despite being a long-time personal acquaintance, and even having played in his cricket team, Oborne concluded that the chairman had presided over the destruction of popular journalism. He ended his polemic with the words "Damn You, Victor Blank!"

News that his new boss Richard Desmond has ignored all that "no editorial interference" guff and ordered the hiring of Bhoyrul as the *Star*'s new City editor must therefore have come as a bit of a shock to Oborne, one of the lucky recipients of the £40,000 freebies handed out by departing Lord Hollick.

If Blank was damned for trying to ignore the Slickers, what should be the fate of a man like Desmond who has actively recruited one of them and foisted him on an unwilling editor? Presumably Oborne will make his views known in the pages of the *Express* – or when he bumps into Bhoyrul in the office they will soon share.

RICHARD DESMOND's promise to invest "whatever it takes" on reviving the Express newspapers may not be quite as generous as it seems.

The terms of his pledge are rather more precise: he'll spend the same amount that he personally paid for the newspapers. Although the total sale price was £125m, £97.5m of this was a loan from Commerzbank. In other words, Desmond has committed himself to shelling out another £27.5m over the next few years.

Still quite a hefty sum, no? Er, perhaps not. In his first month at the helm Desmond has already fired more than 100 staff, including a pregnant woman and a disabled man who had previously been promised a job for life. After further sackings, the redundancy bill is likely to reach £6m. Add to this the many millions he must spend servicing the Commerzbank loan, and how much will be left for actually improving and promoting the newspapers?

READERS of the *Guardian*'s Grand Remonstrance against the monarchy were treated to the personal thoughts of a number of notable figures, among whom was one "Jon" Norton, described as a "painter and banker". Who he?

Norton is very much an *ex*-banker, having been booted out of his job with the Australia and New Zealand bank with a suddenness and finality which almost provoked a cabinet housing crisis. His status as "artist" rests on a recent debut exhibition which was slammed by the critics ("appalling daubs... irritating... conceited" – A.N. Wislon).

So why are the thoughts of this failed banker/artist of any interest to *Grauniad* readers? Apparently because for his day job, by an amazing coincidence, "Jon" Norton doubles as Mr Mo Mowlam.

OH, YEAH? "Madonna really wanted to marry at Althorp House, where the Princess of Wales is buried, [but] Earl Spencer turned down the request.

"It is thought that it was Madonna's admiration for the princess – and not in hope of publicity – that prompted her approach to Earl Spencer."

— Hugh Davies, *Daily Hellograph*, 12 December

"You're lucky – my hair's really mousey"

"Can we forget the VAT if I pay cash?"

THE ever-fascinating subject of Mick Hucknall's love-life prompts a distinctly odd two-page monstering in the *Daily Mail* from that old hipster Ross Benson.

Many of Hucknall's girlfriends, Benson notes, "were not the kind of women you would take home to meet your mother". Worse still, when the lothario did once find "a nice girl" he ruined his chance of domestic tranquillity.

The nice girl in question told Benson that Hucknall had been useless in bed. So useless, in fact, that having first had sex with him up North, she then slept with him a few more times at his house in Surrey. According to Benson, "the young lady, who insists on the discretion of anonymity (a rarity among Hucknall's ex-lovers) met him at the backstage party after a Simply Red concert in Manchester." They went on to get it together down South, closer to her workplace.

Hucknall's associates and the usual music-biz degenerates have been trying to work out the identity of this "nice girl" who talks to *Daily Mail* reporters, lives in the Home Counties but found herself invited by Warner Music Entertainment's press office to a backstage party in Manchester. It is, no doubt, pure coincidence that the guest-list for the party in question included gorgeous pouting Alison Boshoff, now the showbiz correspondent of... the *Daily Mail*!

OH, YEAH? "Graduates will soon be half the population, so Tories will be educated out of existence. To be liberal is to be free of superstition and irrational fear, open to the new, optimistic about the future, knowing there has never been a better time to be alive than now."

— Polly Toynbee in the *Grauniad*, 15 December, responding to William Hague's attack on "the liberal elite"

COURT CIRCULAR

ANGERED by a palace whispering campaign that the Queen will take semi-retirement after her golden jubilee in 2002, Brenda has ordered her private secretary Sir Robin Janvrin to convene an emergency meeting of the Way Ahead Group (WAG) at Sandringham over Christmas.

WAG comprises the top royals and their closest advisers, and was founded by Brenda as a way of coordinating and "modernising" the monarchy. WAG meetings, chaired by her, usually take place annually in the summer. But Brenda wants to get things back under control after a run of hints in the press that she is ready to take a back seat.

Chief suspects as the sources of these tales are the Prince of Wales's spinners; but suspicion lingers that the palace's own press and communications units aren't entirely loyal either.

Brenda in fact has no retirement plans, and having ruled out abdication point blank she views the rumours as a move to sideline her by the back door. Charles will find the WAG meeting particularly depressing – especially as his comforter Camilla Parker Bowles isn't on the Sandringham guest list for Christmas. The Queen's Christmas message for her family is: Brenda still rules, OK?

She has already started her fightback by ordering a reorganisation of the press office at Buckingham Palace. At the beginning of the month she appointed Penny Russell-Smith as her new press secretary.

Brenda gave her a no-nonsense briefing about how she wants to be portrayed. The flunkeys shuffling their feet nervously in the background suspected she had been listening to tapes of Thatch's infamous "on and on and on" speech. Russell-Smith, a career civil servant, will work much closer with the Queen's own spin doctor, Simon Walker. Walker, who is more popular with the royals than his predecessor Simon Lewis, has also been gently reminded that he spins for the Queen – not the other royals.

The Queen has vetoed a plan originating in Downing Street for the palace press office to become more reactive to news. She believes it would be "unseemly" for her staff to rebut every tabloid story with letters and articles, and ultimately self-defeating. She has, however, asked them to come up with more believable expressions of regret at times of national disaster or famous deaths. Brenda thinks the constantly repeated "deeply saddened" phrase has had its day. Prince Philip has suggested that if she gets any more "deeply saddened" she'll end up "a depressed nutter in a bloody loony bin". He has such a way with words the press office might do worse than asking Phil to write its press releases.

Janvrin will also use the WAG meeting to brief the royals on Blair-avoidance tactics in the run up to the general election. These include royal staff checking carefully on which politicians are attending various functions, ensuring the right political mix has been invited and arranging photo-ops so no royal is pictured with a lone politician.

HACKWATCH

Pop Goes The Sindie

IN HER first week as editor of the *Independent on Sunday*, Janet Street-Porter wrote a huffy rebuttal of her critics. True, she was a great friend of the Pet Shop Boys, but "I am not, contrary to popular rumour, going to change the paper into some yoof-oriented rumpus-room, full of pop stars... I will not have Elton John covering the City pages." And she has been as good as her word...

14 May 2000: In a guide to "the most exclusive summer 2000 parties", the *Sindie* notes that the climax of the social season will of course be "Elton John's white tie and tiara summer ball" at his house near Windsor, to which only "a very small number of people have been invited". Including, perhaps, the editor of the *Sindie*? A week later, the *Daily Telegraph* reports that Janet Street-Porter has been seen "swanning around Cannes on the arm of Sir Elton John".

18 June: The *Sindie*'s coverage of the Euro 2000 football tournament is dominated by a long piece from pop star Alex James, who has chartered a plane to fly over with Keith Allen and Damien Hirst. "Keith says Elton John – Uncle Elt – is waiting for us at the Luxembourg restaurant he's totally taken over," James reports. "Which is cool."

25 June: "The Pet Shop Boys headlined the Glastonbury festival last night," the *Sindie* discloses, under a big photo of Neil Tennant. Naturally enough, this important revelation is carried on the front page, with a further report inside.

16 July: A 1,300-word feature in the *Sindie* explains the appeal of the Ivy restaurant: it's the sort of place where "Elton John sits down with Lulu or the Pet Shop Boys".

2 August: The *Daily Mirror*'s showbiz column notes that Janet Street-Porter has been holidaying with Sir Elton John at his St Tropez villa, along with Posh and Becks.

6 August: "Take away these 50 faces and Britain would be a poorer place," the *Sindie* announces, introducing its new Pink List of the nation's fabbest gays. Prominent on the list are Sir Elton John ("the leading diva of the age") and Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys.

30 August: Another bulletin from the *Mirror*'s gossip team: Elton John, Neil Tennant and Janet Street-Porter have been spotted dining at La Petite Maison in Nice with Liz Hurley.

20 September: Yet another *Mirror* scoop: Elton John and Janet Street-Porter have been seen dining at – where else? – the Ivy.

24 September: Sholto Byrnes, the *Sindie* diarist, brings exciting news tidings from across the Atlantic. "Sir Elton John has made his first foray into the world of politics, and if he has his way Al Gore could be transformed from global man to Rocket Man. The occasion was a fundraiser for the Gore campaign in San Francisco last week, when guests paid up to $25,000 each to hear Sir Elton play a selection of his classics... He was due to play only four songs but, obviously fired up by his determination to keep George Dubya out of the White House, he went on to perform nine." Well done, Sir Elt!

1 October: The fashion world rubbed shoulders with the art set at Prada's party in the Royal Academy, the *Sindie* reports. Star of the evening was Sir Elton John, "who combined a slice of both worlds with his polka-dot three-piece suit".

8 October: Yvonne Roberts writes a rather sceptical piece in the *Sindie* about celebs who lend their name to charity appeals, suggesting that the glitterati's involvement "encourages the onset of compassion fatigue". But there's one notable exception: "No one should knock a star who wishes to raise money for a charitable cause as, say, Sir Elton John does for Aids research."

29 October: There's a bright future for West End musicals: the *Sindie* reports that "Jonathan Harvey has written the script for a musical comedy by The Pet Shop Boys".

5 November: Janet Street-Porter has just returned from a fortnight in New York with Elton John. By happy coincidence, *Sindie* diarist Sholto Byrnes chooses this moment to attack *Gay Times* for its "rude review" of Sir Elton's concert at Madison Square Garden, which has apparently upset the singer. "His letter of complaint will be printed in the next issue of the paper," Byrnes reports, "although some might think this hardly an adequate apology."

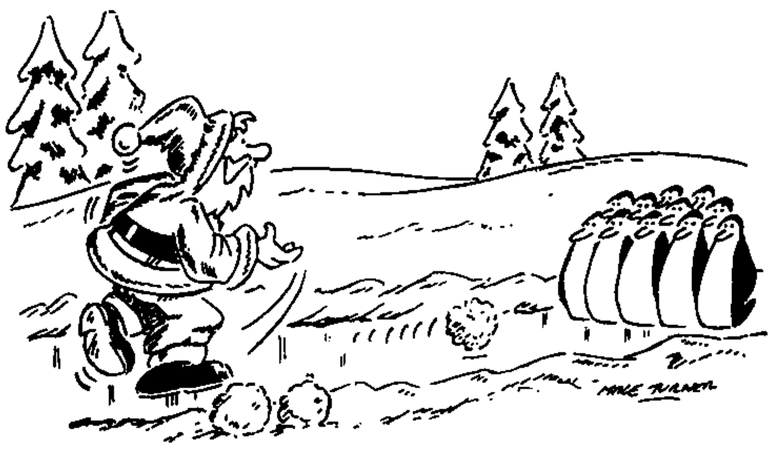
12 November: Philip Hoare reviews a new exhibition of photographs of Oscar Wilde. "In other photographs shown here," he observes, "sub-Wildean acolytes like Max Beerbohm and Will Rothenstein pose like 19th-century Pet Shop Boys." Meanwhile, music critic Phil Johnson reviews a new album from Los Amigos Invisibles: "This Venezuelan combo are as sly and knowing as you could wish for, like a South American version of the Pet Shop Boys." In the interests of balance, the paper also runs a 3,000-word interview with Sir Elton John, in which he reveals "his most unexpected role to date, as one of the world's greatest collectors of photography".

19 November: *Sindie* columnist Joan Smith praises Elton John for running up a florist's bill of £293,000. Sir Elton's spending habits are, she declares, "a refreshing antidote to the puritanism of New Labour." Meanwhile, a profile of theatrical impresario Sally Greene explains just why she's so wonderful: she is "bringing Sir Elton John's *Aida* to London". Sholto Byrnes's diary reveals that Charles Saatchi has been seen dining with Sir Elton John at the Ivy. Even on the sports pages there's no escaping the great man: Nick Townsend's report on the game between Manchester United and Manchester City begins with the news that "at the final whistle, Sir Elton John's 'I'm Still Standing' pounded out over the PA."

26 November: It's the turn of columnist Jo Brand to pay homage. After grumbling about the declining standards charity shops, she mentions a heroic exception: "Sir Elton John is about to open a clothes shop (this being his third project of this type) for selling off some of his clothes to raise money for people with Aids." Brand hails Sir Elton as "a knight in shining armour".

17 December: Hollywood's biggest players are flocking to Britain, the *Sindie* reports. "Disney money is behind two animated films, being developed by British production company Rocket Pictures, owned by Sir Elton John," Equally thrilling is an imminent appearance by the Pet Shop Boys in the last-ever *TFI Friday* on Channel 4. As the TV listings announce proudly, the "all-singing, all-dancing spectacular" will be hosted by "singer-songwriter legend Elton John".

Still no word from the business section, however. Could it be time for Janet to find a new City editor?



BANG-BANG MERRILY ON HIGH!

FOREIGN secretary Robin Cook was no doubt hoping for goodwill among men this Christmas, particularly in the Holy Land. On 12 December he told parliament of his desire that "both sides would refrain from violence" in Israel.

He said to MPs: "There will be no winners so long as this violence continues." But this is not quite true, as Cook and observant *Eye* readers well know.

Arms dealers stand to win lucrative new contracts out of the renewed tension in the Middle East, and Cook, while calling for peace in the region, has actually been licensing sales there of the weapons of war.

When Matthew Parris picked up our story to this effect (see *Eye* 1013) in the *Times*, Alan Sharman of the Defence Manufacturers Association wrote a very angry letter to the *Times* claiming the *Eye* had exaggerated the arms sales. In fact the opposite is the case: both the level of support from Britain's caring, "new" Labour government and the total value of arms sales to the Middle East are greater than we reported back in October.

While Sharman made some interesting technical points clarifying the nature of arms licensing, the implication that the UK is not sending weapons into a war zone is wrong. Indeed, a government-supported mission to increase weapons sales was sent to Israel while the peace process was crumbling.

Another arms-makers' lobby group, the Society of British Aerospace Companies (SBAC), has, in its own words, "prioritised Israel as a key market for the UK aerospace industry". The society is "receiving the full support of British Trade International [the department of trade/foreign office body] and the Defence Export Services Organisation".

SBAC held its first visit to Israel on 17-19 September 2000, with delegates from 15 British arms companies (including BAe Systems and Rolls Royce). Seminars were supported by DESO and the British ambassador Francis Cornish. A reception sponsored by Trade Partners UK, the public face of the trade department and foreign office in sales support, was also part of the package, as was a lunch sponsored by BAe. There were "high level networking events" with the Israeli defence industry and military. Within 10 days of the jamboree Ariel Sharon had made his famous trip to the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount site and ignited the new intifada.

The SBAC sadly reports that Israel is "unfortunately so often at war with its neighbours". On a less miserable note it records that Israel "has developed one of the most advanced and sophisticated defence industries in the world". Nonetheless the SBAC was worried about "the lack of open conflict between Israel and her neighbours for over 20 years", which has caused the country's arms budget to shrink. The final collapse of the peace process removed this tiresome worry within days of the SBAC's visit to Tel Aviv.

THE NEWEST BOY

MARK HENDRICK is a Blairite who slew the dragon of old Labour by triumphing over the spirit of the late Audrey Wise in the recent Preston by-election.

A former MEP for Central Lancashire, Hendrick lost out in the last Euro elections because of the introduction of PR. He claims to have been offered a safer seat in the south, but declined out of loyalty to the folks oop north. He is also an ex-boxer, and fisticuffs nearly ensued in a local boozer before election night, when a local party activist claimed that Hendrick had insulted Audrey's memory. Hendrick sensibly declined the offer to "come outside".

Labour diehards had hoped the seat would pass to Audrey's daughter Valerie. Val "Olive Oyl" Wise achieved notoriety in the 1980s as a sidekick of Red Ken at the GLC, championing wimmin's issues. With such political baggage, the cards were clearly stacked against her ever inheriting her mother's seat. Hendrick is such a "new" Labour toadie he claims to support the government's plan to partially privatise air traffic control!

ULSTER UPDATE

TO judge by the carefully orchestrated leaks and his panic-stricken phone call to the *Today* programme, Ulster secretary Peter Mandelson is regretting his attack on George Dubya Bush.

Mandy was supposedly worried that in recent years Gerry Adams' cheerleaders on Capitol Hill in Washington have been Ben Gilman and Peter King, both of whom are Republicans.

But Gilman is about to lose control of the House foreign relations committee; and although King – who not only rates Adams but has followed his example by authoring one of the worst Oirish Troubles novels ever – is staying put, it won't matter. He can't influence the new president because during the election campaign he publicly denounced Bush and withdrew support for his candidacy.

This followed Bush's visit to the Bob Jones University, a world centre for anti-Catholic bigotry. Bush eventually vaguely apologised for canvassing support from Jones and his flock, but by then had lost the support of the vocal Irish-American groups and now he owes them nothing.

In fact despite Mandy's angst, Ulster's Catholics have more to worry about given the links between Bush, Jones and, in turn, Ian Paisley (who hasn't stopped celebrating since Bush scraped in).

In October Paisley disappeared just at the moment David Trimble imposed sanctions against Sinn Fein after the IRA had failed to hand over any guns. This led to rumours that he was dying; and as news organisations merrily updated their obits in anticipation Paisley's press officers rubbished such suggestions. In fact he was in America following Bush's example by paying homage to Jones, predictably a close personal friend and theological ally who has described Catholicism as "a Satanic cult."

And this was a reciprocal trip. Home secretary Jack Straw and Mandelson made no objection to Jones visiting Belfast to bond with Paisley over the summer.

DAVID LOCK, Labour MP for Wyre Forest, has long been in trouble with his constituents over his support for cuts in local hospital services (*Eyes passim*). Such is the extent of local feeling that Wyre Forest district council was taken over by a 19-strong "health concern group" at the last local elections.

Lock was embarrassed in November when Tony Blair arrived to offer sympathy to flood victims in the area. Instead of expressing gratitude that the Vicar of St Albions should have deigned to visit them, Bewdley residents angrily demanded to know what he was going to do to save their hospital.

In what he thought to be a decisive counterstroke Lock proudly produced a statement from some local doctors saying they did not now support the restoration of A&E services at Kidderminster hospital. The impact of their press release was somewhat diminished as it was headed as coming from "Wyre Forest general pratitioners [*sic*] association".

There were heated scenes in Kidderminster's mayor's parlour as local dignitaries met to turn on the town's Christmas lights. Lock accused Labour councillors active in the fight against hospital closures of stabbing him in the back over the issue. As the company prepared to take part in the town's Three Kings procession – a fundraiser for handicapped children – Lock decided he had enough. Deciding that the Three Kings could manage without him, he stormed off with his children in tow.

THE long-awaited report by Michael Redfern QC into the Alder Hey organs scandal, originally due in the summer of 1999, finally landed on the desk of health secretary Alan Milburn last month.

At more than 600 pages, it promises a comprehensive explanation why the organs of 850 dead children were "filleted" by surgeons and kept by the Liverpool hospital without the parents' knowledge.

Alder Hey, previously dubbed a "centre of excellence", is expected to emerge with ignominy. The report's contents will first be debated under parliamentary privilege before being made available to the public towards the end of January.

Milburn will have his spin doctors working overtime on damage limitation because of the importance the health service has assumed as an election issue.

'Backbiter'

HOW THEY ARE RELATED

SUE PAGE, chief executive of Northumbria Health Care, has just been made a member of the new Modernisation Action Team, the national vehicle designed to drive forward so-called reform in the NHS. Page now publicly advertises herself as a "national moderniser". But taking forward Labour's new agenda of "scrutiny, scrutiny, scrutiny" will inevitably place her own performance in the spotlight.

How lucky, then, that inspection of her own Trust will be the responsibility of a new appointee to the Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority, one Peter Scott – aka Mr Sue Page.

IN THE COURTS

AS the *Eye* was going to press, three appeal court judges were trying to reach a decision over former Tory MP Neil Hamilton's bid to overturn the verdict against him in last year's cash-for-questions libel trial against Mohamed Fayed.

During the five-day hearing, which ended on 15 December, Hamilton's counsel Anthony Boswood QC claimed that the fairness of the original trial had been undermined by allegations that Fayed paid £10,000 for legal documents stolen from the dustbins of Hamilton's lawyers by the *Eye's* old chum Benjy Pell.

In his summing up Boswood argued that Lord Phillips, the master of the rolls, sitting with Lord Justice Sedley and Lady Justice Hale, were hampered in the same way as Mr Justice Morland when he presided over last year's trial: namely by the Fugger's credibility as a witness.

Fayed's latest performance in the witness box included a flat denial that he knew anything about a payment of £10,000 to the freelance journalist Mark Hollingsworth for documents which revealed the line of questioning Hamilton's lawyers planned to use in the trial. In February Hollingsworth told the *Mail on Sunday* he had passed the documents from Pell to Fayed's head of security John McNamara, and that in a meeting after the trial Fayed told him the papers had given him "a bit of a steer" into what he would be asked by Hamilton's lawyers. Neither McNamara nor Hollingsworth appeared in the witness box.

When he took the stand, Fayed once again employed his favourite phrase from last year's trial "It is a possibility". This time he managed to slip it into the dialogue on some 60 occasions. At one point Boswood tried to pin him down on the exact meaning of the word "possibility", asking: "Are we to take it that the word possibility, as indeed My Lord the Master of the Rolls suggested, means yes?" Fayed replied with characteristic inscrutability: "Possibility means yes or no."

THE *SUN* did its bit for the fight against crime with an undercover investigation to expose a man who allegedly stole the GP's surgery sign of serial killer Harold Shipman and attempted to sell it over the internet for £750.

Reporter John Coles, posing as a potential buyer, met computer consultant Steven Davies, 38, and secretly taped their conversations. His evidence was handed to the police and Davies was arrested in February after the *Sun* ran a story under the headline "You sick spiv".

So far so self-righteous; except that when the case came up in Manchester early in December Davies walked away a free man. The apparently solid case against him collapsed after the chief prosecution witness – John Coles – failed to show up. Police who had wasted many hours on the case were not impressed.

Prosecutor Susan Klonin told the court: "There is the clearest evidence against Mr Davies and he is on tape admitting it but it cannot be pursued." Coles was working in Japan, she said, and would return when "it suits him or suits the *Sun*". Ms Klonin said the case would have to be left on the file, which means that the "sick spiv" will face no further proceedings.

Well done, my *Sun*!

WORLD OF SPORT

KATE HOEY, the minister for sport, has given her backing to Glasgow pensions consultant Craig Reedie to receive a knighthood in the new year honours' list, if we are to believe a recent column by Alan Hubbard on the sports pages of the *Independent on Sunday*.

"Old Mother" Hubbard, who praises Reedie for "making much-needed inroads into international administration" as treasurer of the newly-formed World Anti-Doping Agency, suggests the words "arise, Sir Craig" will soon be uttered because Reedie "bats for Britain" at the scandal-ridden International Olympic Committee (IOC). But is batsman Reedie in need of some net practice?

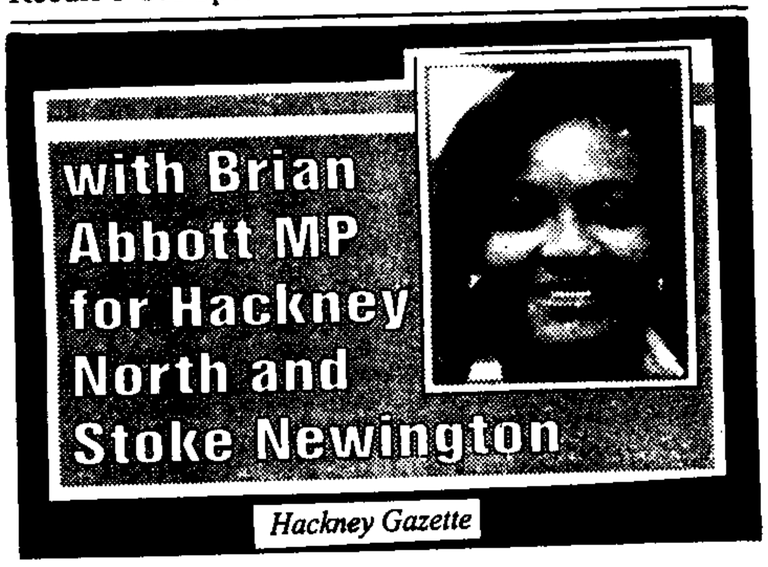
There are about 60 positions for world doping experts at the IOC-dominated WADA. The United States has captured 12 posts, Canada has nine and Australia six. Finland, Sweden and France are tied with four apiece. But Britain – along with world sporting superpowers Luxembourg, Barbados, Algeria and Singapore – has just one representative on WADA: Reedie himself.

Britain has been in the forefront of sport's anti-doping movement for more than 30 years through the ground-breaking work of Professors Raymond Brookes and Arnold Beckett. Britain now boasts world-respected experts in their fields such as Prof David Cowan, who runs London's testing lab for the UK Sports Council, Prof Peter Sonksen, the man who has devised the much-needed test for human growth hormone, and Michelle Veroken, the woman administrator who oversees UK Sport's drug testing programme.

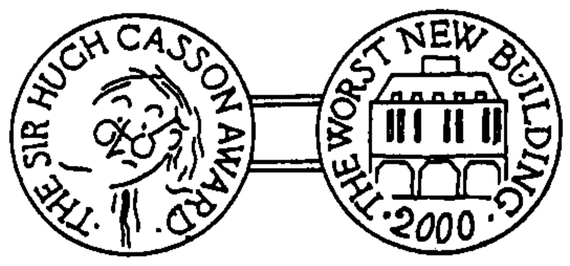
But when it came to finding places in WADA for any of Britain's world-class doping scientists, it appears that Reedie (who has no scientific qualifications) was stumped. Which is a bit of a surprise, especially since Reedie is deputy chairman of UK Sport and chairman of the British Olympic Association, where he works alongside Britain's other IOC member, Princess Anne.

The new agency is clearly dominated by the Swiss-based IOC yet proudly declares its independence. WADA has retained a local law firm, Carrard, Paschoud & Heim, to write its constitution and give legal guidance. Certain to have played no part in this decision will be lawyer Francois Carrard. Carrard happens to be the director general of the IOC.

Old Mother Hubbard's conviction that Reedie bats for Britain may thus be misplaced. Not least because, as a condition of his IOC membership, Reedie swore an oath when inducted into international sport's freeloaders' club "to defend in all circumstances the interests of the IOC". But Hubbard's sources for his story about Reedie's knighthood ought to be good: as well as being a close confidant of Ms Hoey, "Old Mother" also sits on committees as an honorary media adviser to... Reedie's UK Sports Council.



NOOKS and CORNERS

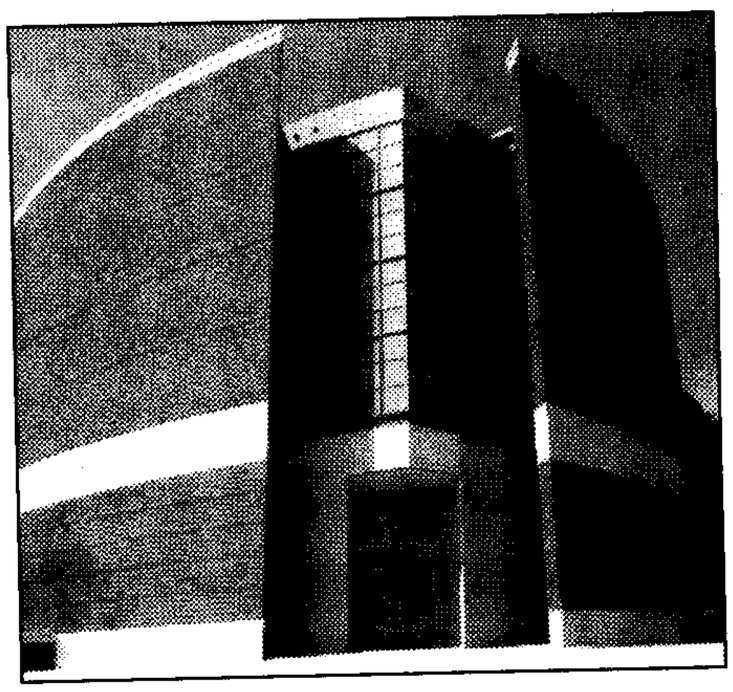


THE time has come to choose the worst building of the year. This is always a challenge; but this year we have had to limit competition as, in shameless emulation of the long-established Casson Medal, the Carnyx Group Ltd, publisher of the magazine *Prospect*, in association with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland has launched the "Carbuncle Award". (*Such* an unimaginative name: sucking up to the silly Prince of Wails).

The carbuncle winner is the UGC Cinema in Glasgow, a design 'n' build tinny lump by Kier Construction. This newly completed building is certainly rubbish, but we cannot concur — especially as the overweening and mediocre new Buchanan Galleries in Glasgow won the Casson Medal two years ago and the city has no shortage of junk architecture to choose from.

Then there is the Stirling Prize, won this year by the Peckham Library designed by Alsop & Störmer. This might be a candidate as the library is a crude and posturing building much inferior — as serious architecture — to the new Walsall Art Gallery which many rightly wanted to win but which suffered from being outside London.

In his tired and emotional acceptance speech (which ought to deter Channel 4 from ever televising the Stirling Prize competition again), the egregious Will Alsop, who imitates the late Sir James in everything except talent, expressed the hope that jurors would not feel that they must not "forget Wales or Scotland or... women or black people with one leg missing"; but loutish and arrogant as the architect is, it was admirable and imaginative of the London Borough of Southwark to have commissioned the library — a building serving a noble purpose — and it is hugely cheering to find it full of local people reading books. So it certainly does *not* deserve the Casson Medal.



The Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College

What does? Not the wretched millennium dome, because it is not a dome at all but a big plastic tent — besides, what is bad about it is not so much the structure as the scandalously expensive non-attractions it contains. Nor the wobbly Millennium Bridge — nice though it is to see an embarrassed Lord Foster trying to wriggle out of his responsibility for the fiasco — as it is not a building either.

Then there are all those millennium projects which, in the cold light of the year after, suddenly seem to have lost their glamour and purpose. Of these perhaps the Lowry Centre in Salford by Michael Wilford boasts the highest ratio of pretentious architecture to content and need. But it is not positively bad. Then there is Portcullis House, the new building for parliament next to Westminster Bridge by Sir Michael Hopkins. This is an object lesson in how spending millions and millions of pounds on a building cannot make good architecture out of nothing, for it is a celebration of negativity, with no centre, no emphasis, not even any stress or interest at the corners. But it is banal, not bad.

So what to choose? Milords Foster and Rogers have won the coveted award so many times that really this sinister comic duo ought to wait their turn for a while. On the other hand, perhaps the Casson Medal ought not go to a named architect as there are hundreds of worthless hypermarkets and industrial sheds which are never illustrated in the journals which really are irredeemably, perniciously destructively bad. How to choose from them? Can any one really be the very *worst* new building in Britain when there are so many so similar?

Musing on this problem I was desperately leafing through back-numbers of *The Architects' Journal* when my eye was caught by the building illustrated in a double page colour advertisement for Ibstock Brick — "REAL people. REAL life. REAL buildings. Brick". At first I thought it was a new building by those good architects MacCormac Jamieson Prichard: it has the curved banded red brick walls ending suddenly to contain glazing as at the new chapel at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, while the general form, with an almond-shaped or *vesica piscis* plan but with the pointed end omitted, makes it strongly reminiscent of the new Ruskin Library at Lancaster University. So I read on, only to find that the small print reveals that it is not by Richard MacCormac at all but by the Crispin Wride Architectural Design Studio. What cheek!

Well I know that almost all architecture is derivative to a degree; that originality is a delusion; that good ideas are worth repeating and so the motifs of one architect are soon copied by another; that clever, ambitious architects copy Modern Movement buildings of the 1920s — which is *good* and acceptable — while a few others copy Georgian houses of the 18th century, which is *bad*. Most architects are derivative, unimaginative hacks and there is no point in pretending otherwise.

The building in the advertisement is The Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College (whose most celebrated *alumnus* was, of course, the late Jeffery Bernard), so perhaps it makes some sense to take inspiration from the Fitzwilliam Chapel. But this chapel is *so* very like the Ruskin Library, except in red brick rather than white concrete blocks, that its "architects" are obviously shameless.

I can never remember who said: great artists don't borrow; they steal. It is certainly true — except that in this instance "great" certainly doesn't come into it. So, for want of anything better, or worse, the Low Life Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College gets the Sir High Casson Medal for the year 2000. Happy New Year!

'Piloti'

EYE TV

Christmas and New Year Schedules (All Channels)

IT was recently suggested here, in reference to the tendency of television to squeeze too many editions out of hits, that the annual panto in the telly business should be the Golden Goose. Following publication of the Christmas and new year schedules, however, Old Mother Hubbard can be suggested as an alternative. There were cupboards less empty than this in Poland during the shipyard strike.

The problem, as predicted by Square Eyes in October, is that the BBC and ITV pulled forward most of their turn-of-the-year surprises to use as ammunition in the ratings war caused by BBC1's installation of a News At Ten. Never actually informed that Christmas was coming early, viewers will gloomily have discovered over the holidays that Lent has also jumped the calendar.

ITV's Christmas Eve, for example, usually the excuse for big movies and specials, consisted of the latest episodes of various winter Sunday shows, including *Heartbeat*, the sitcom *Barbara* and *A Dinner Of Herbs*. Even on Christmas Day, BBC2 has a rerun of a previous Yule offering, the adaptation of Wilkie Collins' The *Woman In White*. BBC1 and Channel 4 also include repeats in their 25 December schedules. It's a televisual equivalent of the sales slump that traditionally hits the high streets in late January because of people over-spending before Christmas.

But Mother Hubbard presides most obviously over new year's eve, on which BBC1 has a repeat of *David Copperfield*, BBC2 rescreens *I Love The Seventies*, ITV grants another chance to see an *Inspector Morse* episode and Channel 4 has a second showing of *Longitude*, a drama from last new year.

In the first week of January, admittedly, the new programming begins and offers the first hints of the kind of television year 2001 will be, apart from turning a certain Stanley Kubrick movie into not just another re-run but an excuse for building up a theme night.

Worryingly, the first offerings from most channels seem oddly retro versions of earlier hits. Channel 4's big dramatisation of Waugh's *Sword Of Honour*, although handsomely done, seems to suffer from *Brideshead*-envy and sits oddly on a radical channel. The same channel's *The 1940's House* is perky and fun but is, in inspiration, a simple time-slip spin-off from the previously successful *The 1900 House*. BBC1's *Escape To The Sun*, a docu-soap about Brits in Benidorm, feels dreadfully like a laboratory mix of *Airport* and *Travel Reps*.

The press announcements of new shows now routinely and without apology connect them with an earlier series on principle of the "If you liked that..." posters which desperate bookshops use.

BBC1's *Clive Anderson Now* — compensation for his talk-show being wiped out by Parkinson's return — is spoken of as a modern TW3. BBC2's big drama series In *The Land Of Plenty*, adapted from the novel by Tim Pears, is hailed as the new *Our Friends In The North*. It's unlikely that TS Eliot much liked television but he proved a sharp critic of the medium when he observed that time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future.

'Square Eyes'

ANIMAL HOSPITALITY

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Mark Antony Worrall-Thompson

GOING LIVE

ON 14 December the BBC's *Ten O'Clock News* went live to Emma Simpson, standing in front of the now familiar flooded high street somewhere, anywhere, in Britain.

There were buildings under water – "you can probably just see some behind me", she said. Things could only get worse. "It's an unpredictable situation," Simpson reported, predicting that "there's going to be a fair amount of misery here tomorrow."

PICK OF THE DAY

Sunday Times

MEDIA NEWS

THE expensive user guide to the revolving doors at Television Centre, revealed by the *Eye* and followed up by almost everybody else, has yielded results.

Forced to defend the introduction of the "Beep 'n' Go" booklet, managers revealed to concerned *Ariel* readers that there has been a reduction of embarrassing turnstile-related incidents. "Since producing the guide, we have seen the number of people getting into difficulty halved."

Who has the time to stand there counting these incidents, the report does not say.

WELCOME back BBC Forum, another waste of licence-payer's money loved by John Birt but loathed by Greg Dyke.

BBC Forum is the "interface" between jobsworths and senior managers which allows the opinions of lowly but grateful staffers to be passed up to The Big Suits. As soon as Dyke learnt that the Forum was almost universally derided by staff as unrepresentative and a waste of time, he set about shutting it down.

It would have been a popular move. But like many of his reforms, it seems to have been abandoned. Dyke has been advised that closure, at a time when the BBC's internal communications are so pisspoor, would send out the wrong signals. So it lives to prattle away unnoticed again.

ONE of the greatest media mysteries of the week was the dalliance between the ginger-mopped DJ and TV presenter Chris Evans and teenage pop star Billie Piper.

While many hacks cynically suggested that the launch of Billie's new single was a significant factor in their well-publicised acquaintance, there are two alternative explanations. The first, as suggested by the *Sun*, is that women find Evans utterly irresistible. But given that ole' Marmalade Mullet pays Elisabeth Murdoch's boyfriend Matthew Freud to get regular mentions in the Murdoch press, this shouldn't be taken too seriously.

The more plausible theory is that Evans fears that his new bosses at SMG, which took over his Ginger Media Group earlier this year, are planning to give him the boot in the new year, and he is desperately trying to enhance his media profile to gain a reprieve.

While Evans' TV show *TFI Friday* is to be axed, audience ratings for his Virgin Radio breakfast show have continued to decline steadily. Getting rid of Evans may prove tricky for SMG as a hefty chunk of the £75m he received for his share in Ginger was paid in the form of SMG shares.

Nevertheless it is likely that Evans and even the Virgin name are on their way out. SMG's main interest in acquiring Virgin was the fact that it is one of only three national radio licences. Evans is merely seen as a nuisance, and now that he has been reduced to starting rumours with a girl half his age, an embarrassment as well.

BBC staff still marvelling at the magnanimity of BBC Worldwide chief executive Rupert Gavin – who sent round an email offering discounted seats to the West End show *Puppetry of the Penis* over the festive season (see *Eye* 1017) – should marvel no more.

Gavin sits on the board of directors of the Ambassadors Theatre Group, which owns the Whitehall Theatre where *Puppetry* is currently playing, and so has a vested interest in the continuing success of the amazing acts of genital origami performed by two blokes from Down Under.

THE "Dianafication" of Prince Charles reached new heights when the would-be King of Hearts visited the set of *Coronation Street* to celebrate the Manchester soap's 40th birthday.

It is entirely possible of course that Charles has been a devoted fan since the days of Elsie Tanner, but the word on the street is that the trip had more to do with the close relationship between the prince's deputy private secretary, Mark Bolland, and his successor as director of the press complaints commission (PCC), Guy Black.

Black, who also shares a flat with Bolland, is a great aficionado of the series and has paid many visits to the Weatherfield set. Unusually for any one programme, the commission has upheld three complaints from members of the *Corrie* cast against tabloid newspapers in the past two years.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON – AT XMAS

KNIFE & PACKER

MY HEAD'S STILL STINKING FROM LAST NIGHT, QUIN. I NEED A "FEEL GOOD" AND I NEED ONE NOW...
HOW ABOUT A FRY UP? HAIR OF THE DOG? AROMATHERAPY?
NO, I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA...
JUST LOOK AT THESE RIDICULOUS PRICES!! I FEEL BETTER ALREADY!!
ESTATE AGENTS
ONE BED FLAT £100,000
FORMER PUBLIC URINAL £250,000
BY LOCAL AUTHORITY BROOM CUPBOARD £120,000
WELL APPOINTED FIRE BOX £1 Million

AD NAUSEAM

IT HAS been nearly four years since "new" Labour's election manifesto promised to ban tobacco advertising in its entirety. During that time we've seen an EU directive to the same end that became law in 1998, a proposed ban in the UK in late 1999 and then a challenge from the German government which led to the European court of justice annulling the initial EU directive (on the grounds that it contravened our "freedom to provide services"). Returned to square one, we now have a preliminary bill in the Commons that's supposed to become law (subject to amendments) early next year – just in time for an election, if we're lucky.

Watching what should have been a simple piece of legislation lurch breathlessly towards the statute book has been a painful, if predictable process. At least we've had the light relief of the tobacco companies and their advertising agencies trying to convince us, among other things, that tobacco advertising does not influence sales, that cartoon Joe Camel, Lambert & Butler's joshing "Butler and bloke" campaign and that hunky Marlboro Man do not impress or amuse teenagers and that citizens have a fundamental right to have fags sold to them, just as they do with all the other products (that don't kill them).

In the meantime tobacco advertisers have been granted a sabbatical to decide what to do next. And no one bends the rules better than our clever friends in adland. The very history of tobacco advertising is one of evermore ingenious scheming to circumvent and subvert the rules. The classic example is B&H, whose long-running pseudo-cryptic campaign (involving gold pyramids and a few other gold things) was conceived back in the 60s by CDP as a response to new guidelines.

Silk Cut soon followed suit. These have become two of the most lauded campaigns in the industry, revered precisely because they were seen as such an audacious two-fingers to government attempts to stamp them out.

All of this was laid bare in a dossier of internal documents submitted last year to the Commons health select committee (CHSC) by the five main agencies selling UK tobacco – CDP, Mustoe Merriman Herring and Levy, M&C Saatchi, TBWA and Lowe Howard Spink (now Lowe Lintas).

The CHSC concluded that "advertising agencies have connived in promoting tobacco consumption, have shamelessly exploited smoking as an aspirational pursuit in ways which inevitably make it more attractive to children, and have attempted to use their creative talents to undermine government policy and evade regulation". This is hardly news to anyone in advertising (on the contrary, it's precisely the stuff that advertising is all about) but it certainly confirms that as and when the tobacco advertising ban emerges, advertising – be it as Embassy World Snooker, B&H Jordan Formula 1, Camel Boots or Marlboro classic shirts – will continue.

Anyway, we should at least applaud the government's commitment to the cause, with the Rev Blair wading manfully through the EU red tape in a bid to save our children. So committed and unwaveringly ethical is "new" Labour that last year it moved its high-profile ad account to TBWA – the same agency that acts for Marlboro Lights and one of the five responsible for the "shameless exploitation" that so appalled the health select committee.

CHARITY

A NOTE of warning for charities jumping on the bandwagon of "managerial culture" comes from Oxfam, which decided to "professionalise" its famous high street shops by bringing in paid managers to run outlets which had previously relied on volunteers.

This was supposed to create more profit to give to aid projects, but as it turned out the strategy has failed. The income of the shops has held up – despite the slump in retail – and so this year the shop income was £59.7m as opposed to £58.9m last year. But due to the increase in "professional" costs, the amount available for actually giving to aid projects has *fallen* from £15m last year to £7.6m this year.

Oxfam maintains the situation would be worse without the good managers now in place, but it concedes that perhaps the charity might now be, er, a bit "management-heavy". Charities now say they have to pay a decent salary to attract top executives (Oxfam pays its director £75,000); but the argument begins to look increasingly threadbare if the adoption of "pragmatic" business solutions leads to failure in the very idealistic endeavour which commands widespread support. Lord Joffe, chair of Oxfam's trustees, is a new Labour peer and should thus be particularly aware of this argument.

I JUST LOVE THE SHOPS AT THIS TIME OF YEAR!
SALE
SALE
SALE
BUT IT'S AN UGLY FREE-FOR-ALL OF GREEDY PEOPLE TRYING TO GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING
SOCKS 50% OFF
OH I'M NOT HERE TO BUY. I GET TO RETURN ALL THE CHRISTMAS PRESENTS FROM MY PARENTS— I MEAN, THERE'S NOT A SINGLE DECENT LABEL ON ANY OF THEM..

DOING THE ROUNDS

A day out in Bristol

MD got a warm welcome when he accompanied a relative for heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary last month. As one member of staff remarked to the professor of surgery: "You know who that is, don't you? You'd better not fuck this one up."

Fortunately the standards of angiography and surgery were superb and any lingering doubts about the expertise of the staff were dispelled by the unit's excellent prospective audit, which is still the only one in the UK to be published on the internet (*Eyes passim*). However, the surroundings left a little to be desired. The angiography suite is in a new building on one side of the road and has a spanking new ward nearby that's ideal for patients to recuperate and be closely watched in case an artery blocks off suddenly (a recognised complication).

Alas the ward's been allocated to care of the elderly, which means that following angiography patients have to go three floors down and into a dark tunnel under the road (known locally as "the dungeon") and up again to recover on the less than salubrious ward 20. If their heart stops suddenly, then it's back down to the dungeon and in the lift, with staff furiously pummelling the chest in the hope they can make it back to the angiography suite. The fact that managers have not grasped the idiocy of this situation is symptomatic of their general disinterest in improving the service.

Elsewhere there are beds in corridors, patients on chairs praying for a bed and patients in beds who've been waiting for surgery for months. Their plight was bravely championed by Peter Wilde, radiologist and director of cardiothoracic services for the United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust, who made Tony Blair look like a floundering guppie during the televised debate into the state of the NHS held at St Thomas's in March.

He surprised Blair with evidence of big regional differences in funding: "We have only half the national level of funding for heart surgery, and we have 700 patients on our waiting lists, of which 100 have been waiting for more than a year for open heart surgery. In the last six months 20 patients have died while waiting for this surgery," he said. "We fall not 5 percent or 3 percent below the national average; we fall 45 percent below. We are being committed to waiting lists targets, and yet 70 percent of our patients are also urgent and need to be operated on immediately."

The government has now bunged a few extra million Bristol's way to paper over the cracks in the angiography service, but it has come too late for Wilde, who has resigned his management position in despair. Other consultants talk not just of the lack of central funding, but that managerial apathy continually undermines the work of the unit and prevents it from becoming truly innovative. Chief executive Hugh Ross is an improvement on his disgraced predecessor John Roylance, but is still a huge disappointment and has the air of a man sitting on his hands and hoping to move on soon.

The situation is not helped by the attitude of the old guard consultants from the Wisheart era, who are understandably tense pending the much delayed findings of the public inquiry (now allegedly postponed until March). One senior surgeon was so threatening to general manager Rachel Ferris that she has gone off sick and made a formal complaint, as has a senior nurse. As in the dark era, the trust executive has shown itself to be incapable of sorting out these inter-professional rivalries and seems content to let the situation fester. So as in Oxford, a unit with some very gifted individuals may be left to self destruct.

The Bristol unit has also received precious little support from the department of health, which should have championed its public audit system long ago and insisted all units follow suit. The public inquiry may recommend the centralisation of child heart surgery to half a dozen specialist centres, and in the scramble for survival, other units may suddenly become open about their figures. But the inquiry's findings are likely to be compromised by the fact that many of its expert advisers are themselves wary of the level of scrutiny Bristol received and may water down their findings to deflect attention from their own shortcomings.

For example, blame has already been spread out to other Bristol staff, such as the perfusionists accused of keeping patients on bypass for too long. But if the patients were too sick to come off bypass because of the failed surgery, what were they supposed to do? Just pull the plug? Expect more buck-passing come March...

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

RICHARD BRANSON's memory is still playing tricks whenever he talks about his involvement with railways.

In a letter rejecting the *Independent on Sunday*'s request for an interview, he claimed once again that his company had "embarked upon the biggest investment programme this country has ever seen". He has been reminded repeatedly — including in the *Eye* as recently as last July (1006) — that the investment in new trains is by financial institutions and not Virgin. But already he has forgotten.

The *IoS* pointed out most of the errors in the letter but missed another lapse of Branson's memory which caused him to claim credit for having fixed the Eurostar service through the Channel tunnel. "With the new Eurostar trains it was easy to do relatively quickly," he recalled.

Perhaps someone could gently remind him that the original London & Continental Railways deal to build the Chunnel rail link collapsed in early 1998 because Eurostar was not bringing in enough cash to help fund construction. Virgin held a 17 percent stake in LCR and was involved to improve Eurostar's marketing and revenue. Sadly the task proved too difficult for Virgin, which was dumped unceremoniously when the deal was restructured and Eurostar was entrusted to Branson's friends at British Airways, along with National Express and the state rail systems of France and Belgium.

RAILTRACK is hoist by its own petard on signalling work as well as the poor state of the tracks.

In May 1999 *Eye* 977 reported how hundreds of highly skilled signal engineers were being sacked because Railtrack had cut back on signal renewal to save money in the short term. Now it desperately needs the engineers back to upgrade the west-coast route and install train protection warning system (TPWS), the cheap imitation of automatic train protection (ATP).

After the Paddington crash Railtrack was so eager to get TPWS officially sanctioned instead of ATP that it based its estimates of the time and cost involved on a simplistic and superficial analysis of the work involved. It even promised to complete installation a year ahead of the government's 2003 deadline. One signalling expert told the *Eye* the chances of meeting either target were almost nil and Railtrack had yet to solve three-quarters of the problems with TPWS, such as making it compatible with old signalling.

The signalling engineers who survived the cull will no longer jump at Railtrack's command, as *Modern Railways* magazine reports: "Not only is TPWS installation slipping, it is costing more. If Railtrack is going to sort out TPWS, it looks like a case of 'pretty please' or tough luck."

PASSENGERS on the Kings Cross-Leeds train which derailed at Hatfield on 17 October, killing four people, received a letter a week later from GNER's chief executive Christopher Garnett.

"The derailment of the train will have been a very alarming experience for you," he wrote. "Everybody in GNER is profoundly upset and deeply concerned about the accident. In particular our thoughts are with those who have been injured or who have may lost family or friends... As an immediate gesture of goodwill I would like to refund to you the full cost of your ticket together with any other out of pocket expenses you may have incurred..." Passengers were told to write to customer relations manager Gary Metcalfe to make such claims.

Eight weeks later, Metcalfe has started to reply to those who contacted him. And clearly GNER's lawyers have vetoed any more expressions of regret or "deep concern" — indeed any expression of regret or concern — pending the outcome of the inquiry into the crash. "Dear ——," writes Metcalfe. "Thank you for your contact. I enclose the promised cheque to the value of — covering the cost of expenses incurred. Yours sincerely, Gary Metcalfe." And, er, that's it.

THE relationship between railway staff and the media, not good at the best of times, has suffered a turn for the worse during the rail crisis.

When the number of carriages on the First North Western rush hour route from Salford to Bolton was reduced from four to one at the start of December, one local hack suggested to the guard that the overcrowding might appear in an ongoing series in the local press. The guard exploded in anger at such provocation and told passengers that if they were going to play it that way he would call the police and have everyone thrown off the train. He duly alerted the British Transport Police, but by the time they had arrived some 20 minutes later many of the passengers had dispersed in search of alternative routes for fear of being arrested for, er, trying to get home.

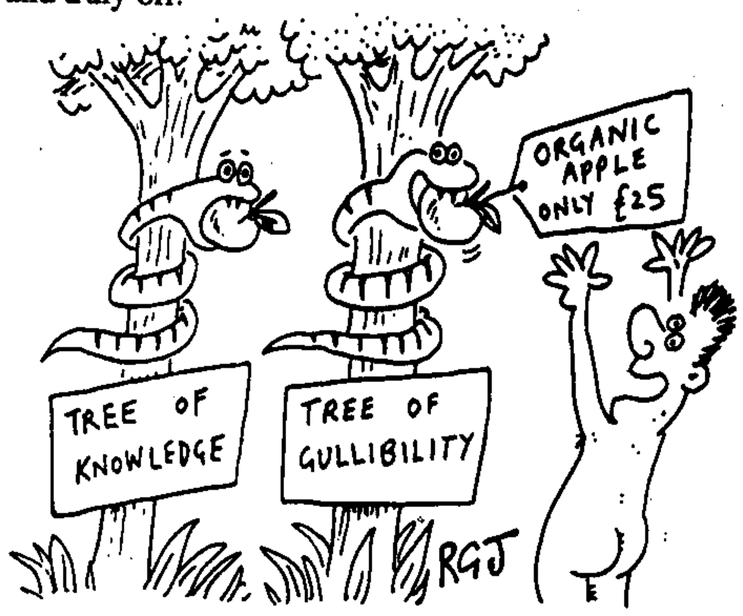
'Dr B. Ching'

DOWN ON THE FARM

ADVOCATES of genetic engineering portray it as a precision technology whose effects can be predicted and limited to the modified organism. So it is appropriate that the case that could destroy that bogus image was predicted long ago.

In June researchers at Jena University in Germany showed that modified genetic material in pollen from GM rape could cross the species barrier, and was positively identified in bacteria from the guts of honeybees. That, though alarming, was no surprise because it is known that bacteria habitually take in and use DNA from other organisms.

In a rational world that finding alone (even its possibility) would be enough to stop GMO development dead in its tracks, because if GE material after its release into the environment can jump into other organisms, Pandora's box has had its lid blown well and truly off.



It wasn't enough — but it did shed light on a puzzle for American beekeepers. New World bees suffer a bacterial disease called American foulbrood (AFB), outbreaks of which have been successfully controlled by the antibiotic tetracycline for 40 years. In 1996 resistance to tetracycline appeared in bee bacteria in Argentina, the US, and shortly afterwards Canada, the three countries which grow 98 percent of the world's GM crops.

This remarkable coincidence is so far unexplained; but since the German research a nasty suspicion has formed in beekeeping circles. What had bees in those specific countries been collecting? Pollen from GM crops such as rape, maize and soya. And what was used as a "marker gene" in many of these crops? Why, a gene for tetracycline resistance in bacteria!

The transfer of antibiotic resistance to bugs in farm animals, most of which are of course given GM feed, has been widely feared. Research to look at gene transfer in animal guts is on-going at Leeds University, where publication by MAFF of early results has been unaccountably held up.

Circumstantial this bee story may be, but it can only be a matter of time before one of these backwoods beekeepers needs to make a *trip into* town for supplies and posts a few diseased bees to a laboratory which can identify the source of the resistance. If it is GM, then the splattering from the faeces/fan interface should waken even the dozy US and Canadian public, whose own governments have for years forcefully silenced or cast out the numerous dissidents among their own researchers.

A senior researcher at a British institute describes this scenario as "entirely plausible"; and of course we now know for certain that modified genes cannot be confined to the target organisms.

'Gumboot'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CERI BABY

THE WEB of secrecy surrounding Flintshire county council's unlawful £21,000 redundancy pay-off to old folks' home manager Jean MacFarlane (*Eye* 1004) is beginning to unravel.

Counsel brought in to advise on the matter by Flintshire's legal director Andrew Loveridge concluded that that "fabricated documentation and sham arrangements" made by Jeanette Antrobus, director of personnel, and Jonathan Bacon, director of social services, constituted a breach of the duty of fidelity required by their employment contracts.

But when it came to reporting to the council Loveridge omitted the names and changed a section which read "documentation was created which misrepresented the position" (ie to allow the unlawful redundancy payment to be made) to "the strategy was that documentation was created which represented the position" — a not-so-subtle difference.

Presentation of Loveridge's report was delayed until after the May elections which returned a Labour administration and promoted council leader Tom Middlehurst to become a Welsh assembly member and secretary for post-16 education.

Flintshire's "disciplinary panel" called to look at how Jeanette Antrobus fiddled the record let her off with a warning, leaving her free to be promoted to director of human resources. This promotion of course had nothing to do with her close friendship with Tom Middlehurst. It appears, however, that the district auditor has been asked to see if it did. He says he can do nothing unless he gets some direct evidence — and his report is due in the new year.

The Eye can only suggest that now is the time for all public-spirited people in Flintshire to come to the aid of the district auditor, Ceri Stradling, (1st Floor, Unit A, Parkway Business Centre, Deeside Industrial Park, Deeside, Flintshire, CH5 2LE) and tell what they know. Perhaps they could drop the *Eye* a line at the same time!

● **GOOD to see a councillor trying to educate the public into a clearer understanding of local authorities' responsibilities. At a public meeting to discuss transport, reported the *Alton Herald*, Hampshire county councillor Tony Barron explained that newly fallen autumn leaves were the responsibility of the county council. "But if they had accumulated and were wet, slippery and soggy, they were then classified litter and should be dealt with by East Hampshire district council." Glad that's cleared up!**

BEAM ME UP, BILLY

IF THERE were an award for the councillor who has given the most entertainment to the public in the past year, it would surely go to Billy Buchanan, an independent on Falkirk council.

Apart from constantly warring with the ruling Labour junta and making a series of wild sexual and financial allegations against colleagues, he has done a terrific amount for local tourism. Hundreds of anoraks come from abroad — especially Japan, where Billy is something of a hero — to attempt to spot UFOs around the small town of Bonnybridge, which Billy wants twinned with Roswell, New Mexico, site of an alleged UFO crash in 1947.

In the face of local scepticism Buchanan arranged a conference at which he was to produce his evidence of extra-terrestrial encounters. On the big day he failed to turn up — later claiming he had been abducted by aliens on his way to the meeting. All this clearly affected Buchanan's credibility as a serious politician. At the last local election he was... reelected with an increased majority.

● **NOT EVERY council is at such pains as Hampshire to clarify matters when things go wrong on the roads. Motorists in Cambridge were confused by new signs at a T-junction which instructed drivers to "give way to the right" — when to the right was not a road, but a wooden fence. A council spokesman said: "The whole point of the scheme is to confuse drivers," er, "to make them take more care."**

SIMON SAYS...

LAST December (*Eye* 990) we reported on a highly critical district auditor's report on how an outfit called Clear Communication got a £75,000 PR contract for Vale of Glamorgan council without the job going out to tender.

On 29 January 1998, J. Underwood, S. Simon and D. Chapman of Clear Communication entertained the council's then Labour leader Shaun Stringer at Benedictos restaurant in Cardiff. The bill for this agreeable evening came to £278.60. This was paid by Clear, which then claimed the money back from the council, plus a further 25 percent "on-cost". The very same S. Simon who ate so well at Benedictos also spent seven nights at the £95-a-night Marriot Hotel during spring 1998, charging £262.50 of evening meals and £210.85 spent at the mini bar and on room service to the council tax payer.

While Stringer was later convicted of fiddling his expenses and barred from public office for life, his gluttonous dining companion has continued to enjoy the high life — although he boasts that he has recently shed some eight stone (down from a magnificent 20). Step forward *News of the World* and *Telegraph* columnist, *Spectator* associate editor and restaurant reviewer and enthusiastic new Labour toadie Sion "Bunter" Simon, who in the current edition of the *Spectator* gives a proud explanation of his eating habits: "Fat people are greedy... [and] my greed is beyond dispute." Er, you said it, Sion!

POETRY CORNER

JOANNE SMITHERMAN, Tory councillor on Medway council for St Margaret's ward, Gillingham, is a bit of a poet in her spare time. So proud is she of her literary efforts that she has posted some examples of her work on the Gillingham Tories' website.

Here's a sad one, about a chap who seems to be a bit of a cad:

You do not think of the harm you cause, / With your lack of mind and lack of thought. / Liable to the people that surround you. / Unable to control the urge that takes you. /Do consequences have a change of effect? /Or is it that you just lack respect? / Indestructible, that's what you are! / Tell the girl down the road, who wears the scars... / What does it take to make you see? etc, etc.

Moving, isn't it? It's called "Reckless". Not terrifically impressed, however, is the Tories' prospective parliamentary candidate for Medway, one Mark Reckless.

"It's your own fault for coming to live in London!"

● **MORE TRAFFIC confusion, this time in Colchester, where Inspector Knacker has collared Cllr Tim Young, leader of the borough council's Labour group and prospective parliamentary candidate. After his Ford Mondeo was "involved in a collision" with a policeman directing traffic at a new road system, the portly Dome-lover finds himself charged with assaulting a police officer, dangerous driving, failing to stop for a constable and failing to report an accident. He was due to appear before magistrates on 21 December. Cllr Young's responsibilities, by the way, include... community safety. Happy motoring!**

High Principals

THE first major event in the life of New College Nottingham (NCN) in the year its principal Dame Pat Morgan-Webb received her new year gong (see *Eyes passim*) has been a huge cut in college finances, placing jobs and courses at risk.

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) told NCN to pay back £3.5m after the college over-estimated student numbers by 10,000 in the two years since it was formed by the merger of four local colleges.

Responding to an article on the crisis in the *Nottingham Evening Post* last month, Dame Pat wrote: "We have inevitably faced some difficult post-merger operational issues which have been compounded by a well-publicised and significant change on policy on franchising affecting all colleges." She failed to mention, however, that the disaster was in fact predicted two years ago, when Carlton College, NCN's predecessor, was highlighted as one of the top six colleges at risk of over-claiming on student numbers, in the damning public accounts committee (PAC) report into a staggering £14m over-claim at Halton College.

Dame Pat has managed the financial crisis with characteristic heavy-handedness. To the embarrassment of her marketing department, she ignored its advice to lay low and sent staff an email at the end of October entitled "Rumours", warning that an article was due to appear in a local newspaper that day, and denying either that she was leaving or that NCN had been taken over by an American college. In fact no one at the college had heard the rumours and they were not mentioned in the *Nottingham Evening Post* report (which appeared 10 days later).

The principal's last hope to restore her reputation is the outcome of an FEFC inspection next year. With this in mind she is subjecting many departments to mock inspections. Not only have these increased the pressure on staff already fearful for their jobs, but at a time when the college is desperately trying to cut back in all other quarters, they have meant hiring inspectors to assess lecturers' performance at an estimated cost of £60,000.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

The New Year Baby's a perfect symbol for our movement...
Out with the Old, in with the New!
Right!
...and I think that Damien handled it very sensitively.
Can't see what all the fuss is about.
Happy New Year!
2001

Letters

Gathering winter fuel

Sir,

Re: Front cover - taking issue! Whilst I enjoyed the festive theme on the cover of Eye 1017, it hardly reflects reality as we now know it. No, I'm not disputing miserable commuters, it's just that when did we last have snow like that depicted? The scene is something of a paradox - since no trains means more cars, which means more fossil fuel burning, more global warming and therefore less or no snow?

COLIN TROTH,

Hall Green, Birmingham.

La Pollard

Sir,

I should like to inform Backbiter of my surprise upon meeting Kerry Pollard, MP for St. Albans, referred to in the current edition of 'HP Sauce' using the female personal pronoun. The reason for my surprise? Finding not the gushing Blair-Babe implied by the article, but a fat bearded northern bloke in a suit. I also noted with interest that Mr Pollard has been summoned by the whips on no less than seven occasions for voting against the government.

Keep up the (otherwise) good work.

Regards,

STEVE MILLER,

Product Director, Century 24 Solutions Ltd.

Going for growth hormone

Sir,

Re: 'Glands off'. Injecting BSE-infected cow brains into mice causes BSE-like symptoms, so it would not be surprising if injecting infected brains (from any source) into people did the same. OK so far. But then you whizz off into fairyland. "Growth hormone" does not deserve the quotation marks - it is a protein that most people's bodies make, but the few unlucky sufferers from pituitary dwarfism do not. It is pretty much essential for normal growth, and only the human version works in humans. So until the mid 1980s the only source of growth hormone was, well, people's brains. You can ask people to donate blood, or even a kidney, but donating a brain is beyond even the most altruistic, so doctors had to wait until the people were dead before getting the stuff from the pituitary gland.

There were never enough glands, of course. Maybe some morticians cut corners on the strict rules about which glands they could collect. Maybe they were the ones who had seen, as you obviously have not, what pituitary dwarfism was like.

What happened in 1985? The real change was not the first tragic death from CJD caused by hGH injections. It was the creation of a new source of safer growth hormone, from US biotech and drug company Genetech. It was GM hormone from genetically engineered bacteria.

Now, there is a dilemma for your editorial team.

WILLIAM BAINS,

Via e-mail.

Bad deal

Sir,

Contrary to your item in last week's Literary Review, The Guardian didn't reach an out-of-court settlement with me over Julie Burchill's – as you put it, bilious – review of my novel, "Whatever Love Means". They reached an out-of-court settlement with me over a separate remark she made in her column ranking me as an equivalent evil, in global terms, to Nazi Germany and fascist Japan. The small sum in damages went to the Holocaust Educational Trust.

Yours with reference to whatever 1960s joke one is supposed to make when one writes in to Private Eye.

DAVID BADDIEL,

London, NW3.

Lookalike

Jagger

Grinch

Sir,

Did the Grinch steal Christmas? Or has he been falsely accused? I think we should be told.

Yours faithfully,

MATT O'DONNELL,

Reading, Berks.

Beet roots

Sir,

I've just read the letter from Edward Barrow of Brixton (Eye 1015). His letter is factually incorrect with statements like, "for most of the year, sugar beet fields lie brown and barren". He obviously doesn't understand the cycle of a plant as it can't produce a root the size of a sugar beet without many months of growing, in fact not a lot less than a year. Sugar beet has a different harvest period than corn crops, being harvested from late October through to early the next year. As soon as the field is empty the next crop is planted, normally a corn crop, as sugar beet isn't planted on the same field twice in a row, a simple technique called rotation introduced by farmers many moons ago. He may also like to consider what the farm workers and farmers do if there is no sugar beet to harvest? They certainly can't farm more corn crops as those have been undercut by cheap third world imports, so are hardly worth producing. So the only option open to them is tourism. Now surely that is exactly what you are trying to avoid in third world countries.

JASON BORTHWICK,

Norfolk.

Soya sauce

Sir,

Even Newer Muckspreader (Eye 1016) asserts that there will be a global shortage of feed soya if meat and bonemeal is finally banned across the EU. However, he has completely forgotten that cattle can be fed equally well, if not better on cheaper home grown fodder crops such as curly kale, mangolds, lucerne and of course red clover, without having to use expensive imported GM soya.

The practice of growing fodder crops is as old as crop rotation, but most farmers have been discouraged from growing them by the monopolising multinational feed companies and also by the farcical Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which allows vast areas of set-aside land to remain fallow.

Ulster Protestant farming folk are thankfully made of sterner stuff and have no truck with Brussels Shite Edicts and have been maintaining the tradition of growing fodder crops in addition to silage. In over 30 years of farming here in the Glens of Antrim, I have never used soya or meat and bonemeal and consequently have never had a single case of BSE.

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM T. McCAULEY,

Cushendun, Co. Antrim.

Mail of the species

Sir,

Some of my best friends are Daily Mail readers. Unlike you, they have the intelligence and maturity to understand that being in favour of tougher immigration controls is not the same as being against immigrants as people.

Yours faithfully,

JOSEPH B. FOX,

Redhill, Surrey.

"I've never seen a busker who works from home before"

Cained?

Sir,

Re: Square Eye's report on Frost Night (Eye 1017). It was mentioned that "almost 50 percent of the air-time [of Frost Night] was filled with yet another showing of The Ipcress File".

That's strange – I thought the only thing on Frost Night that I actually watched was Funeral in Berlin.

Hope you have a happy Christmas and a brilliant 2001.

Yours faithfully,

PAUL SPENCER,

Via e-mail.

Georgia Bush

Sir,

Reading your Letter from Georgia (Eye 1017), I came across the following sentence: "He could probably have won without the stuffed ballot boxes and the slightly unusual counting system, but some old habits die hard."

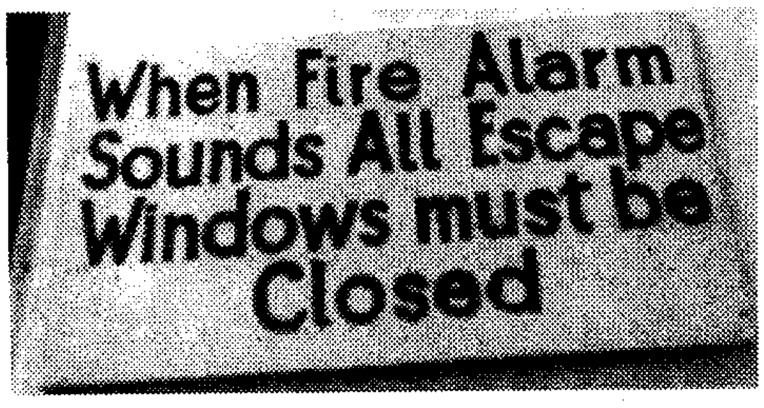
I had to read the piece again before I realised it was referring to Eduard Shevardnadze and not George W. Bush.

Cheers,

NOEL SINCLAIR,

Bexhill, E. Sussex.

I-SPY *Royal Dundee Liff Hospital*



Submitted by Thomas Hanley. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Ups and Downs

Sir,

Re: New Ground For Brighton & Hove Albion (Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1017).

You state that the new stadium will be "in an area of outstanding natural beauty on the South Downs". As a Sussex man born and bred I know a bit of Downs when I see it; and a field bordered by a bit of Brighton University and a railway line doesn't fit the bill.

"On a good day the team attracts a 6,500 crowd". True, but this is only because this is the current temporary ground's capacity – all home games are all ticket. To get an idea of latent demand crowds during our last season at our old ground (cruelly sold from under our feet – while the FA took no action – by an ex chairman who wanted to build a retail park) were near double this.

You speak about the referendum last year and compare it to North Korea. Surely it is just as Korean to say that all those who didn't vote are necessarily against the scheme, as your report implied. And deeply cynical about local government "Rotten Boroughs" may be, but a turn out of 35 percent in a local referendum gave a mandate many local councillors would die for.

*The five other sites mentioned are either too small, not available, or in at least one case really **are** on the Downs. To propose building there really would be worth a Private Eye article.*

Stir your stumps from the "Lamb and Flag" and take a trip down to Brighton (the beer's better too!) Visit the site and drawn an honest conclusion about whether the stadium would ruin Falmer – a village already cut in two by the A27 – and from which the stadium will be shielded.

Yours sincerely,
J.R. HAWKINS,

St Helens, Merseyside.

Verser and verse

Sir,

What's this? A sad, ill-informed lie
About Brighton FC in the Eye?
Such cretinous dross
Makes me thoroughly cross
And I'll read it no longer. Goodbye!

Yours,
ATTILA THE STOCKBROKER,

Poet in Residence, Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club.

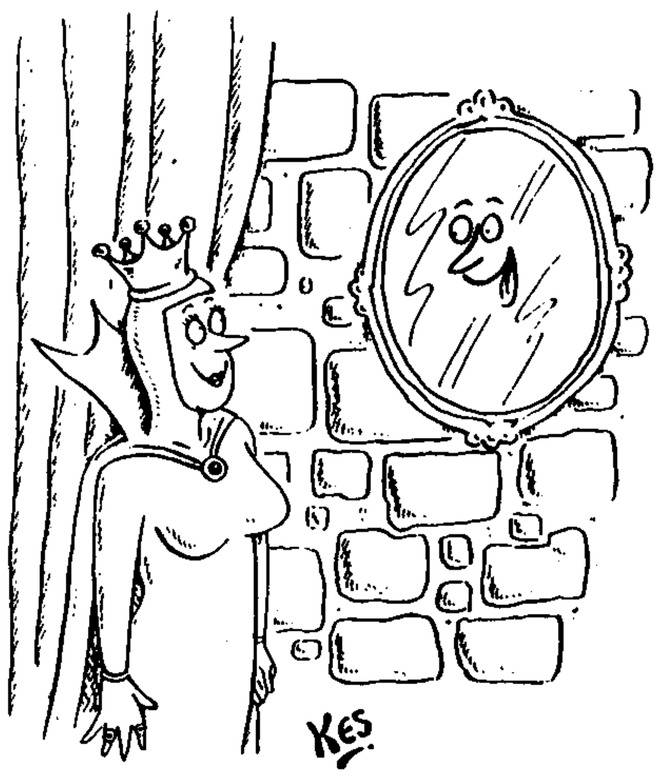
Hand balls

Sir,

With reference to your article "Marchioness: The unanswered questions" (Eye 1017) I also have a query. In what way does removing the hands from a corpse manage to render it incapable of transmitting infection? And why on earth should metropolitan coroners, of all people, imagine that such a procedure would be efficacious in this regard? Is this some arcane piece of mortuary superstition? It seems to have left your reporter unsurprised, but I can't be the only reader who found the whole concept at least a little disturbing and decidedly under-explained.

Yours,
A.L. KENNEDY,

London SW6.



"Oh yeah... Since she married the prince, Snow White has really let herself go"

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Ziege hits it high for Heskey who isn't playing."
ALAN GREEN, Radio 5
(Martin Walsh)

"It is a cauldron in which the French are being roasted."
ANDREW MARR, BBC1
(Michael Aisbitt)

"They've maintained their unbeaten record between the legs."
BARRIE DAVIES, BBC1
(Mike Price)

"I think we have enough talent to win if we don't rely on talent."
Ice Hockey Coach, Post Bulletin, USA
(Dan White)

"Vauxhall's workers accused the chairman of being a Judas who washed his hands of them."
London Live
(Paul Blezard)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

THAT MAN IS INCAPABLE OF LYING UNDER OATH.
INTERVIEW ROOM
VERY WELL. I'LL SEE HIM.
INTERVIEW ROOM
I'M AFRAID THAT YOU'RE NOT SUITABLE FOR POLICE WORK

Letter from **Accra**
from Our Own Correspondent

FIRST of Europe's African colonies to win independence, first to slide into dictatorship and first to see the economy fall to pieces, we in Ghana like to see ourselves as trend-setters.

We are supposed to lead the way again when, if all goes to plan, we change presidents next month: not by a conventional military coup but through the novel mechanism of an election.

On the way out should be 53-year old Flight-Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, the half-Scottish fighter pilot who seized power briefly in 1979 and then again with a vengeance 18 months later, settling into two decades in power, first as our gaunt, rabble-rousing, radical military ruler and then as our elected, ever more portly civilian president, with a new fondness for fast cars and jacuzzis. Now, though, he has completed two terms and the constitution says he must stand down.

"Junior Jesus", as his adoring supporters used to call him, is hoping his charisma-free deputy John Atta Mills will take over. He is up against the even more uninspiring New Patriotic Party candidate John Agyekum Kufuor. But things have been going rather badly for our cocoa-dependent, aid-supported, corruption-riddled economy this year and the stock of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) is not high.

So to give Atta Mills a fair shout, our supreme court waded in to endorse the old, dodgy voters roll and the use of thumb print identity cards, an essential tool for rigging elections. If the message wasn't clear, just before parliamentary elections earlier this month, the army was ordered out on Operation Bold King, an exercise that involved soldiers rushing round Accra securing "strategic locations" in case of a coup d'état.

But there were no coup-makers in sight. All that happened was that Jerry John's NDC lost the parliamentary elections and that makes it harder for Atta Mills to win the presidential vote. So forgive us for thinking that the only coup on the horizon might be against our popular choice for president.

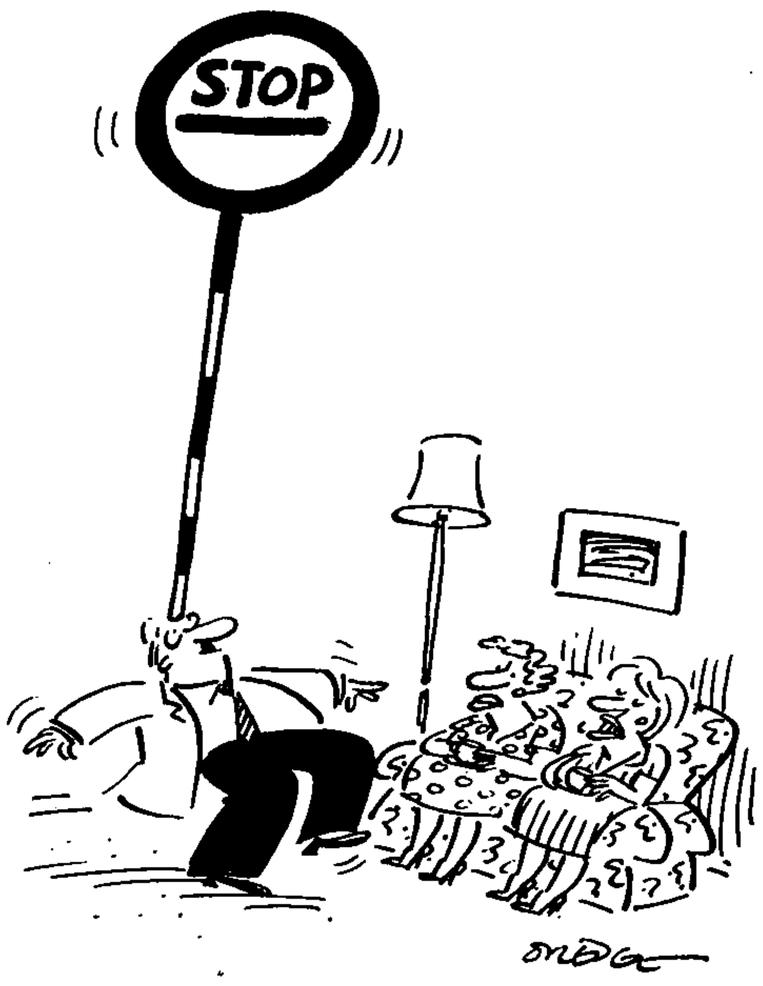
A president with no ties to Jerry John might start asking awkward questions about Ghana's disappearing dissidents or the millions of dollars of state funds whose whereabouts are equally unknown. In 1979 the interests of peace and justice demanded that three former military leaders be shot on the beach. In his second coming, some 400 dissidents "were disappeared" and many more shot in a succession of coups and counter-coups. We have never forgiven Jerry John's holy warriors for kidnapping and murdering three judges in the dead of night.

Our leader still likes to think of himself as the original man of the people, fighting for social justice and the common good. But the likes of Fidel Castro and Muammar Gaddaffi who became our allies in the early days have long since been despatched in favour of Washington, IMF loans and liberal reforms that have left us almost as poor as we used to be. Most of us have to eke out a living on a couple of dollars a day, while our currency has collapsed from three cedis to the dollar in 1980 to 7,000 today. Where has all the money gone?

And we wonder how easy it will be to dispense with such wise use of executive power. In September, Selassie O'Sullivan-Djentuh, an enterprising young lad who had attracted the eye of our leader's daughter, Zanetor, turned up in Britain, claiming asylum. He said that after he ended the affair, he'd had his head shaved with a broken bottle by thugs, while his two ageing parents had been harassed, assaulted and charged - with beating up the distinctly fierce-looking commandos on guard duty outside the president's residence.

A somewhat worse fate befell Daniel Chakitey, a minibus driver unwise enough to be involved in an accident last month with the presidential motorcade. He subsequently died in police custody. While such incidents are the talk of the town, our newspapers remain circumspect. Earlier this year the *Chronicle* became only the latest in a series of offending publications to be "shit bombed" when persons unknown break into the newspaper offices at night to spray buckets of excrement around.

The opposition promises to usher in a new era and launch investigations into some of the most blatant excesses. But as things stand, no one is ready to bet much that they will even get the chance.



"It all started when they pedestrianised the school access road..."

JUST FUGGIN' FANCY THAT!

"Richard Ehrenberg's *Capital and Finance in the Age of the Renaissance* (1928), states that 'it is undeniable, moreover, that the Fugger in many countries were hated by the people. Envy and misunderstanding contributed not a little to their unpopularity. In popular language their name was used as a generic term for a great monopolist. The Fucher, Fokker, Fucar and so forth have ever since become in many different countries the name for the financiers which the people held responsible for every evil.' This is presumably in reference to Jacob Fugger the Rich (died 1526), who gained his vast wealth from control of the silver mines of Schwaz, dealings with merchant houses of Augsberg and Bruges, and the Habsburg dependency on instant loans to ease their constant strifes. He was possibly referred to by both Maximilian I and Charles V as 'that Rich Fugger'."

– Letter in *History Today* magazine

The Telegraph Attempts To Cover The Smutty City E-Mail Story

"Bradley is a nice guy but he's not the sort to hold back on what he has been up to," he said. "If he hadn't been such an egomaniac he wouldn't have found himself in the trouble he is now.

"But it was just a bit of male bravado that got blown out of all proportion.

Daily Telegraph

Plugged In

Having been starved off *(sic)* all contact with the outside world during your six weeks on Big Brother, what was the first thing you watched after your release?

I think the first thing I watched when I got out was Sky News. But even though there was a television in my hotel room, I refused to look at it for the first couple of days.

Nick Bateman, *The Times*

Nominated by Mad Max.

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

"I bought the house last week at a sheriff's auction," William Houttekier told reporters in Toledo, Ohio, "after the government had foreclosed on it. Apparently, the property taxes hadn't been paid for several years, and I got it for a good price. But imagine my surprise when I made my first visit to it, walked into the living room, and found a skeleton sitting bolt upright in a chair, facing a television set."

County Auditor Larry Kaczala later explained how the body of fifty-year-old Eugene Bearringer had remained undetected for more than two years after his death. "When a property is foreclosed and goes up for sale at auction, no one from the county ever sets foot in it. The government would have no right to go into that property, because we don't own it. We just sell it for the back taxes. I understand that Mr Bearringer's mail didn't pile up, because it was delivered through a mail slot, and that neighbours thought he'd moved away temporarily to convalesce after a long illness. They thought he'd be coming back one day, so they kept the garden trimmed for him."

Next-door neighbour Dean Nowakowski added, "I always wondered what had happened to that dude. We assumed he'd gone to visit relatives, and to cure his asthma. I used to hear him coughing hard in the mornings, but come to think of it, it has been really quiet over there lately, apart from the noise from the tv set. I often wondered why he always had the same channel on. Now I know." *(Toledo Sentinel, 20/11/00. Spotter: Bob Pierson)*

—o—

"You and your company have acted disgracefully towards these villagers," Deputy Judge Anthony To Kwai-fung told Yeung Kwok-sang in the Court of First Instance in Hong Kong. "By dumping noxious substances in their village, and using black magic tricks, you have shamefully tried to harass them into leaving their homes. I therefore find you guilty of contempt of court for breaching the injunction order made in July."

Earlier, the court had heard from Law Suk-Kai, who spoke on behalf of the residents of Pak Tin Village. "Yeung and his Excel Sky Management company wanted to evict the villagers, so they could use the land for high-rise development, and they tried every dirty trick in the book to get their way. On several occasions, they dumped tons of rotten pork in the middle of the village, broke electrical and telephone wires, and smashed drainpipes. But worst of all, they used black magic to try to destroy the village's feng shui. One morning, the villagers awoke to find that the company had erected eleven long poles overnight, each one bearing a set of seven metal scissors with open blades pointing in the direction of the homes of various villagers. According to feng shui, this will bring death to the person at whom the scissor blades are pointed. They also released 1000 slugs into the fields."

Yeung and Excel Sky were fined $50,000, and forbidden to enter the village. (South China Morning Post, 7/12/2000. Spotter: Dr George Adams)

—o—

"The Annals of Improbable Research (AIR) awards are presented annually by Harvard University to scientists who have conducted experiments which should never have been performed. The inspiration for these awards was the example of an American scientist, who spent five years inventing the world's first bear-proof armour suit.

This year's runners-up are as follows: a European study which used magnets to levitate a frog and a sumo wrestler; a man who invented a sensor to detect when cats are walking on your computer keyboard; a researcher who set out to find the tastiest species of tadpole; an Italian and

American team which discovered that love is indistinguishable from a severe obsessive compulsive disorder.

But the winner of the AIR award for 2000 is Ellen Greve, better known as Jasmuheen, founder of the now-discredited Breatharian movement. After claiming to be able to live solely on divine light or 'prana,' supplemented by the occasional chocolate biscuit and cup of tea, she was challenged to prove her claim by the Sixty Minutes television program. They locked her in a hotel room, but stopped the experiment after four days, when she had lost 6kgs, and was showing signs of severe physical distress, despite having eaten an entire month's supply of chocolate biscuits."

(The Brisbane Courier-Mail, 1/11/00. Spotter: Norm Reynolds.)

apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
NURSERY RHYME SMALL ADS : A TREASURY
OWL: recently divorced wltm gd-lkng birds; likes boats (NO CATS).
DOGS DISPOSED OF the 'No Food' way. Cntct Mother Hubbard Kennels.
FOR SALE : CLOCK Unwanted gift; too noisy. Call before 1pm.
LIKE A LAUGH? Me too! Little Dog seeks others for fun. GSOH essential.
(GENUINE PHOTO)
DISH & SPOON seek other crockery/cutlery couples for adult fun.
NEED A LOAN? Call CROOKED MAN FINANCE today!!!

PEACE TRIP LATEST

by Our Northern Ireland Correspondent **Dan E. Boy**

GERRY ADAMS today flew into Washington in what was seen as a historic trip as he attemped to broker peace between the bitterly divided warring factions in a dispute stretching back many weeks to the start of the "troubles" they've had electing a President.

"Let me make it very clear from the outset," said the highly respected international terrorist, proudly shaking George W. Bush's hand, "that despite how I'm portrayed in the press, I'm no republican sympathiser.

"It's clear to me unless America can rekindle its faith in its faltering democratic process and enter into some sort of power sharing agreement then it's going to be bloody murder for the rest of the world."

TORIES SUFFER AFTER RECENT DAMNING CRITICISM

by Our Police Staff **Sir Paul Flavoured-Condon**

THE CONSERVATIVES are losing recruits after they were branded "institutionally useless" in a report by a senior Judge.

"Morale is rock bottom," said a spokesman. "Recruitment is at an all-time low and Tories are leaving the force in their thousands.

"They have lost the support of the ethnic communities," he continued, "even in areas such as Tunbridge Wells."

On a typical estate in Surrey (Sir Reginald Frobisher's Clapton Hall, 978 acres) where there used to be Tories in abundance, there is now only one Tory within 100 miles.

"You can go for days," said 87 year old Lady Victoria Hooray, "without seeing a single Tory with their reassuring uniform of tweed jackets, corduroy trousers and shooting sticks. Nowadays they are all in their cars or sitting in offices staring at computer screens.

"No wonder," she said, "people like me are afraid to go out at night."

Advertisement

The Number One Best-Seller

THE RAILTRACK BOOK OF RECORDS

compiled by Horace, Maurice and Boris McCorbett

Did you know that:

★The slowest train journey in history was the 7.42 Connex South East from East Grinstead to West Grinstead. It took 147 hours and 12 minutes!

★The world's shortest train was the 17.41 Virgin InterCity from Carlisle to Newcastle which had only enough room for the driver and guard!

★The most number of passengers in a single compartment was recorded on the 9.03 Thames Turbo Express from Bristol Temple Meads to Didcot Parkway. A staggering 12,642 customers crammed into the 2nd Class compartment!

★Mr Thomas Winterbottom, a 52-year-old civil servant managed to read the entire works of Anthony Powell during his week-long journey from Haywards Heath to Brighton.

★All these and many more amazing facts provide the best holiday entertainment for all the family who can't get home because there aren't any trains.

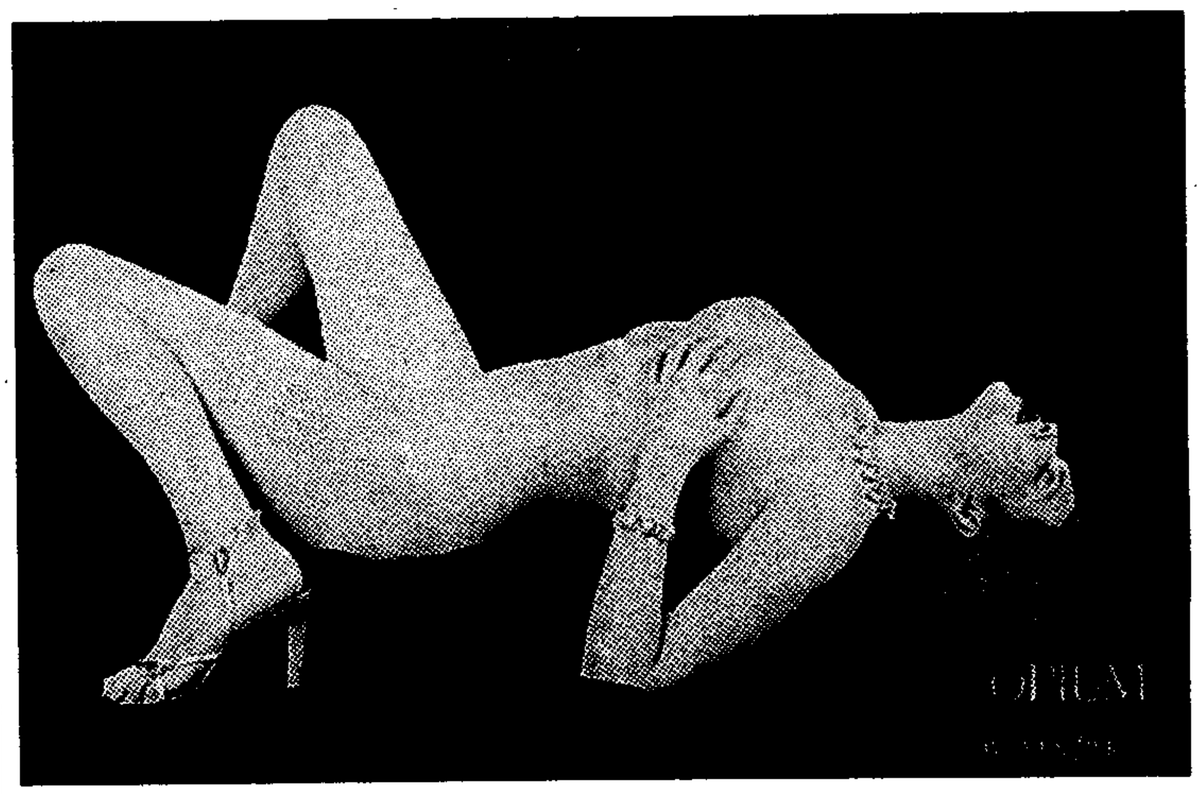
Lines On The Most Important Wedding In The History Of Scotland

by William Madonnagal

'Twas in the year 2000 of our Gracious Lord
That a woman got married whom the whole world adored.
As the popular American singer known as Madonna,
Vowed to Guy Ritchie that she would love, obey and honour (him),
Bells rang out across the glens
And the hotels filled up with her celebrity friends.
The lovely Gwyneth Paltrow and dashing Brad Pitt were there,
As was Sir Elton John and his amusing hair.
Stella McCartney designed the wedding dress
And a huge number of hacks flew into Inverness.
Great was the rejoicing amongst English papers
Who could fill their thin pages with these Highland capers,
"Madonna and Child and Guy Ritchie Too –
See page 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 52".
And as over Skibo Castle the sound of pipes soared
The entire nation got terrifically bored.

© Madonnagal 2000.

The Mail Says Ban This Revolting Picture



ON OTHER PAGES: Other pictures which are too revolting to show.

"We think there's been a mix-up with your frozen embryos"

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

From The Vicar
A Special Christmas Round Robin To All Parishioners
(to be inserted inside the Vicar's Christmas Card)

Dear .....

I obviously don't have time to give you all an individual Christmas message of goodwill and peace though I was lucky enough to meet several of you at Mr Dimbleby's "Meet The Vicar" Wine and Cheese Evening in the Carlton Hall. It was marvellous to hear your concerns and I'm sorry I wasn't able to deal "in-depth" with all your excellent questions. But Mr Dimbleby has kindly suggested that we do it again soon. What a brilliant idea! Provided, of course, the hall is available – which Mr Campbell says it isn't!

Well, what a year it's been and how quickly time has flown. The big event at the vicarage has obviously been the arrival of little Leo(!). I've been losing a lot more sleep over Leo than I have over some of the silly squabbles in the parish this year! Honestly, having a child really puts things in perspective – like Gordon's disloyalty, Mr Dobson's dismal performance in the Panto (and, by the way, what a good job Ken is doing – just as I always said he would), Mr Robinson's disloyalty, the lorry drivers blocking the high street, Mrs Mowlam's disloyalty, Mr Prescott making a fool of himself during the floods, etc, etc. I could go on, but it's Christmas and we are meant to be positive and forward-looking! So, I don't think Cherie will mind me saying that she has had a marvellous year expanding her human rights business and opening up a new suite of offices over the carpet shop. And yet, despite her busy schedule, she is always home in time to remind me to put Leo to bed.

Well done, Cherie! And well done, Euan, who has gone from strength to strength ("Tenants Export to Tenants Extra", he tells me. Whatever that means!) and he assures me he is working "flat out" to get his AA levels!

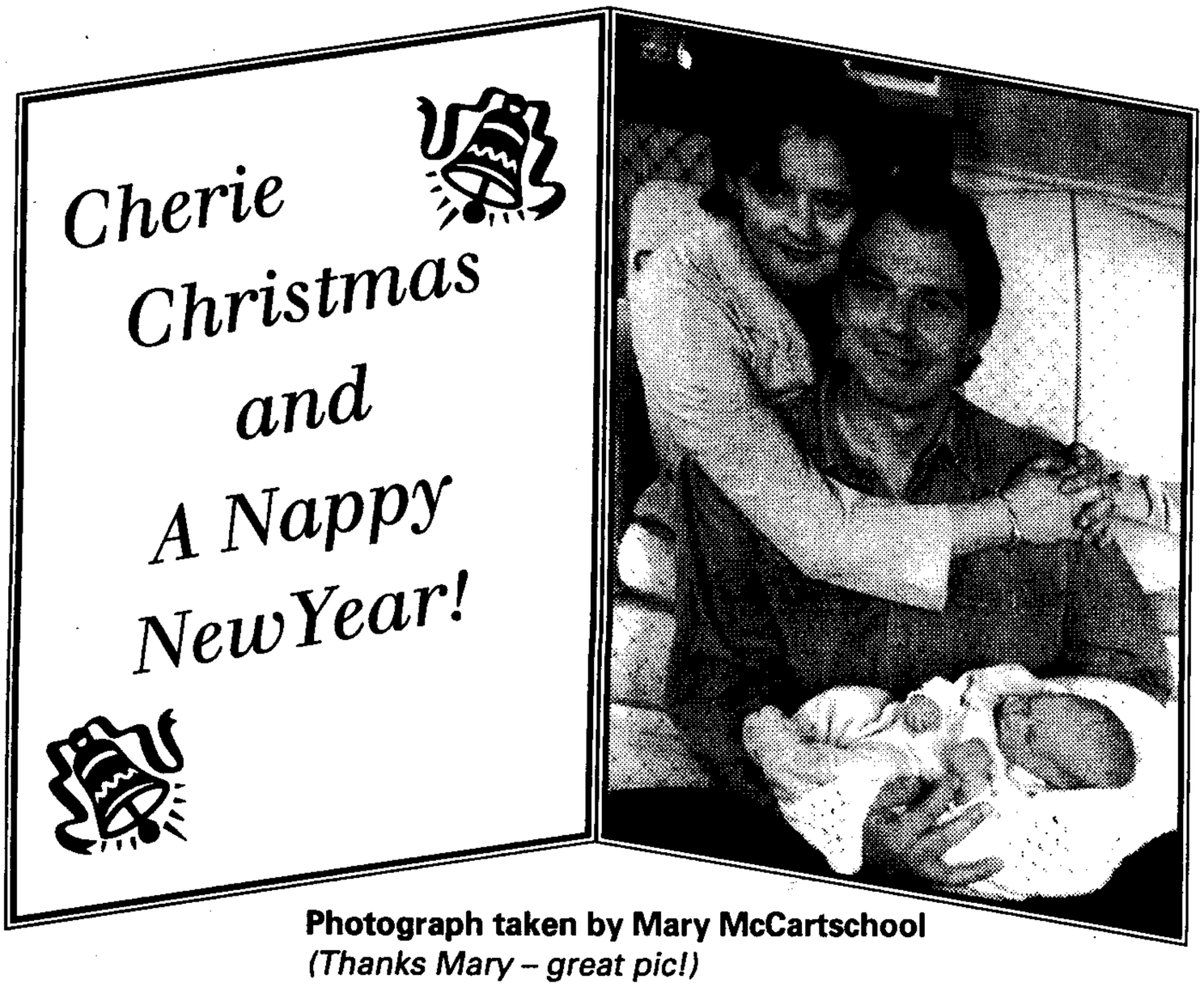
So, that's all for now, except to remind you that the Millennium Tent wasn't a terrific flop after all. I went last week to say goodbye to Mr Gerbil and to thank him for the tremendous job he has done.

He greeted me with a broad smile and said, "Thank God – you're the first visitor we've had all week."

Also, commiserations to Mr Branson who was so keen to take over the Tombola. I only wish Richard could have accepted with better grace the fact that we have to be very careful about the kind of people we allow to run important parish institutions like the Tombola. We can't just have any old cowboy! *(This is not a reference to Mr Branson. A.C.)*

Well, I'd better sign off and leave you with our Christmas Card and its great funny message by Mr John O'Farrell!

Tony



Photograph taken by Mary McCartschool
(Thanks Mary – great pic!)

Text Message

PRICK EXPOSED ON TV

Vauxhall Workers' 12 Days of Christmas

On the first day of Christmas
My employer gave to me
An assurance that he valued me.

On the second day of Christmas
My employer gave to me
A two day working week
And a restructuring of the company.

On the third day of Christmas
My employer gave to me
Three weeks of notice, two fingers,
My P45 and the death of the town's industry.

Er... that's it.

CHRISTMAS FILMS

CHRISTMAS EVE SUNDAY

8.00pm (ITV)

"A Christmas Carol" (Made for TV, 1989). Gene Hackman stars as Lennie Scrooge, a Toronto businessman in this adaptation of the Dickens classic. McCaulay Caulkin is Tiny Tim and John Cleese pops up as the ghost of Hanukah Past. Songs by Burt Bacharach and Hal David (106 minutes)

BOXING DAY EVE MORNING

4.30am (C4)

"The Penguin With No Name" (1976). Comedy caper classic with Clint Eastwood teaming up with a penguin in an Antarctic circus rompt. Co-starring Sandra Locke (Mrs Eastwood) as good-time Innuit showgirl, Eskimo Nell. (207 minutes)

NEW YEAR'S AFTERNOON DAY

7.00pm (BBC1)

"Brains, Blood and Bollox" (1999). TV premiere of Guy Ritchie's acclaimed gangland classic set in Manchester's Moss side. Vinnie Jones stars as "Braindead Danny" who sets out to shoot everyone in Manchester through the mouth. Watch out for a superb bus chase sequence. (212 minutes)

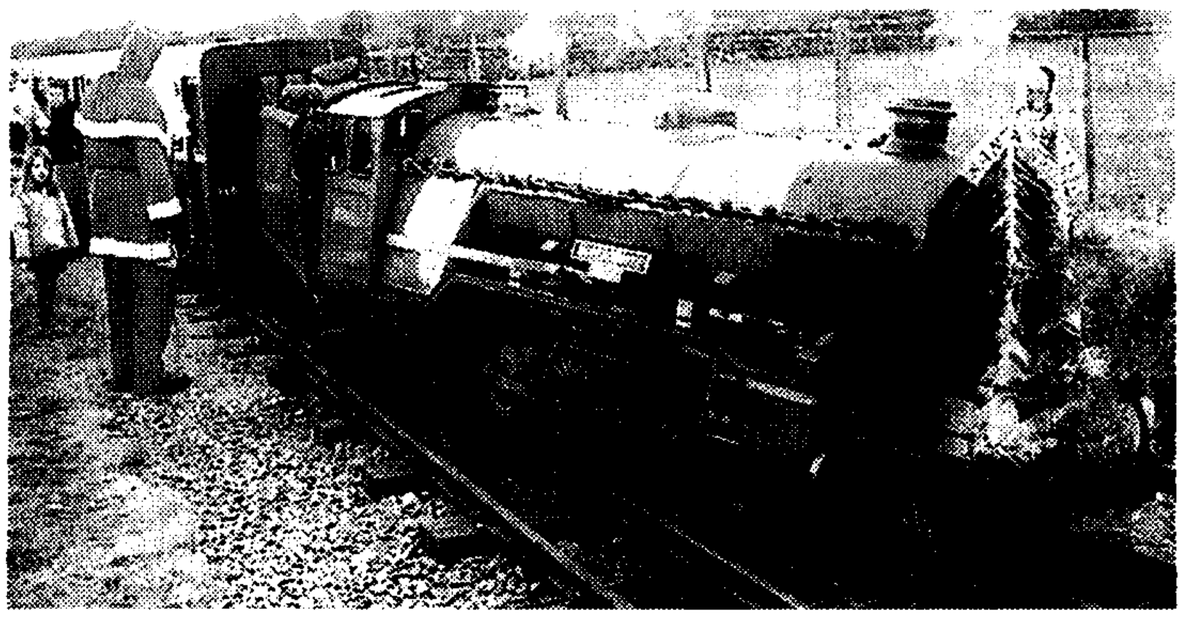
NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAY SUNDAY EVE

3.30am (Sky Premiere)

The Muppets "War and Peace" (1994). Full-length feature of Tolstoy's classic with Kermit as Pierre Bazuhov, Fozzy Bear as Prince Andre and Miss Piggy as Natasha. Marlon Brando nearly steals the film as the Emperor Napoleon. Including the unforgettable song "I'm walking backwards from Moscow". (780 minutes)

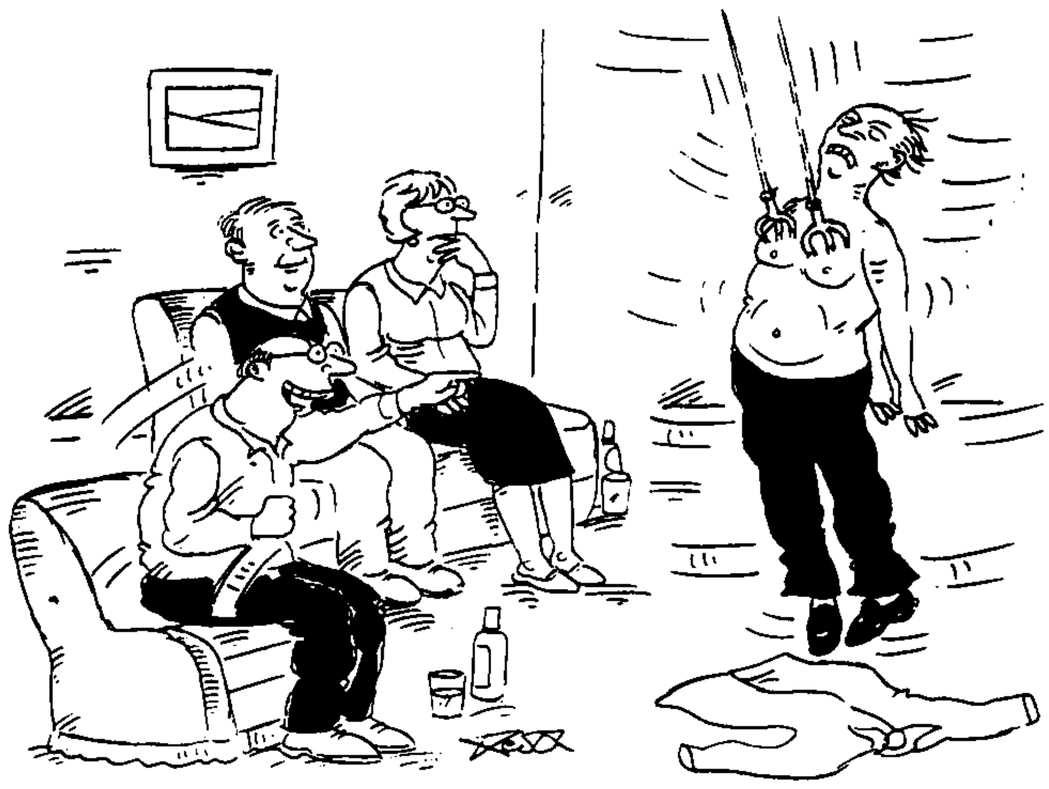
"They Flew To Osaka" TCM (Black and white 1952). Cult Japanese re-make of the 1943 classic British war film "They Flew To Bruges". Directed by Kurosawa and relocated in the 14th century Samurai kingdom of Mitzubishi. The David Tomlinson role (Group Captain "Chalky" White) is taken by Tzumi Sushi. (10 hours) (That's enough films. Ed.)

FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT



"The Railtrack Children" BBC1 Christmas Morning 7.30am

Charades



"Got it! A Man Called Horse! A Man Called Horse!"

XMAS 2000

Blair's Card

RACE

Hague's Card

POLLY FILLER

Val D'Isère, Tuesday

CAN someone please, please explain the point of skiing? Wouldn't it be cheaper to climb into the freezer and throw fifty pound notes down the drain?

And this is supposed to be fun? I stupidly gave in when the useless Simon threatened to go off on his own, leaving yours truly in sole charge (apart from Ivanka obviously) of a furious toddler who is still angry with Santa Claus because he got a Playstation 2 (£285) instead of a Bob The Builder soft toy. Talk about ungrateful!

Anyway, the next thing I know we're all four of us (Ivanka with the luggage) queuing up at Gatwick looking like Michelin Men in day-glo skiwear that would make even Kate Moss look like Vanessa Feltz!

And what a miserable five star chalet awaited us, with some dim blonde girl trying to cook cordon bleu cuisine and ruining the most simple dishes by flirting with Simon. *(Don't you mean "putting too much cream in the Pave de Boeuf en Blue D'Auvergne"? Ed.)*

Luckily, she left in tears after I complained to the Rep and she was replaced by a hunky Australian called Guy who Simon rather pathetically allowed to make him feel inadequate and jealous. Men! Really! Things went downhill(!) after that! Someone had failed to tell me that skiing means going up a mountain! In winter?!

OK, the scenery is quite nice in a chocolate boxy sort of way, but if the company didn't want me to get vertigo, the stupid girl at the caisse shouldn't have sold me a lift pass.

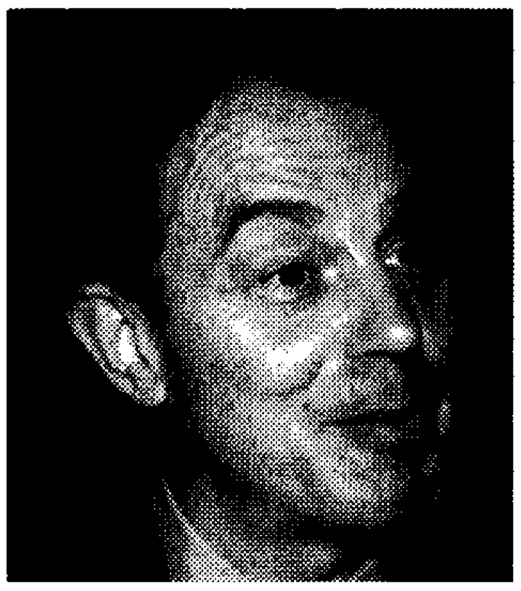
When they finally stopped all the lifts and prised me out of the bubble car I said it was a disgrace and I was never going to ski again. Everyone seemed to think this was a good idea and clapped wildly.

MEANWHILE, Charlie cried all day in the snow-crêche and the stupid French girls tried to talk to him in French – it must have been *obvious* he was English!

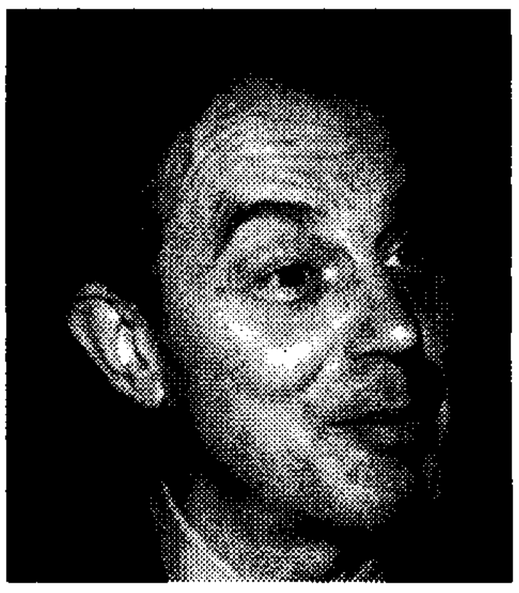
No wonder he bit the little girl sitting beside him at lunch. They should have known that Charlie only eats fish fingers for lunch – with peanut butter on them. Have they no experience of toddlers at all?

What a disaster! So, if anyone tells you they've had fun ski-ing, remember – they are not only mad, but they are lying as well. *I* know. I've been there, done that and got the t-bar.

© Polly Filler



Hague is trying to whip up people's feelings by exaggeration...



His speech is worse than Enoch Powell's about Rivers of Blood flowing in the streets...

FLOODS AND RAIL CHAOS HIT BORES CEREMONY

By Our Boré Correspondent
Simon Jenkins

FOR THE first time in 2000 years, the world-famous Bores of the Year Awards, jointly sponsored by Lord Gnome and the Equitable Life Insurance Company (motto *"You're safe with someone else"*), were held for the second year running in the same venue, the Millennium Dome.

"This decision was inevitable," explained a spokesman Emannuel Strobes, "since not only has the Dome surpassed all expectations by becoming the most boring building in the history of the world, but we were offered it for free."

LORD FALCONER

Thousands of celebrity guests had been invited to a special banquet prepared under the supervision of TVs "queen of the cooks" **Nigella Boreson**, but only 65 managed to get through the combined disasters of storms, floods and the late-running of all those trains which had not been cancelled.

There was inevitably a sense of anti-climax as the first course was served to guests, consisting of peanut butter sandwiches and Mr Kipling's Individual Mince Pies, personally selected from the shelves of Tesco by Ms Boreson.

However, the evening came alive when giant telescreens lit up with the 40-foot high image of the host chosen to introduce this year's winners, **Sir David Frost**.

SIR CHRISTOPHER BLAND

As the much-loved veteran, familiar to all six viewers of his hit BBC Sunday morning TV show, *No One's Watching*, found difficulty in pronouncing any words other than "Hullo, good evening and good morning", he had to be hastily replaced by Panorama's **Marlella Frostrup**.

The blonde newcasterette then read out the short-list for the coveted trophy of "Bore of the Year". "The judges," she said, "were split down the middle. Exactly 50 percent voted for **Mr George 'Boreya' Bush**, and the other 50 percent for **Mr Al Bore**.

"After 212 recounts, Lord Gnome referred the matter to the US Supreme Court where Radio Four's **Sue McGhastly** and **Jim Naughtie** were called as expert witnesses to expound at enormous length on the subject of dimpled chads."

As the audience in the Dome began to fall asleep at the very mention of the word "chad", waitresses removed the remaining plates of Aunty Nigella's Christmas baked beans on toast.

Hundreds of American lawyers then stormed the stage to protest that the entire ceremony was obviously rigged and should be moved to Dade County, Florida, in order for the correct result to be obtained (ie, large cheques for themselves).

JERRY HALL

Ms Frostrup was arrested by Marshals acting for **Governor Jeb Bush**, and was replaced by **Ms Carol Borderman** who came on dressed as a lapdancer.

"We have done the sums," announced the near-naked Ms Borderman, "and we have decided to award the title of Bore of the Year to **John Prescott** instead."

Stepping out of one of his many Jaguar cars in a frogman's suit, the Secretary of State for the Polluted Environment, Lack of Transport and Flooded Regions clambered onto the stage to be given the award by the now totally nude mathematician.

"Everything is completely under water," he began. "I mean, under control. It's all because of this global warning. But luckily I've got everything back on railtrack."

He then handed over to **Lord "Gus" Macdonald** to explain to the booing audience the finer points of why there could be no crisis on the railways because there were no trains.

MARTIN AMIS

Brief respite was then offered as **Ms Charlotte Church** stepped up to sing the theme tune to *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, with words specially written by the Poet Boreate, **Mr Andrew Motion**. Her performance was rudely interrupted by lawyers acting for her former agent demanding 10 percent of all global virtual performance rights, including "cyber-territories yet to be identified".

As the floodwaters began to rise inside the Dome, a hologram of the late **Mr Eric Morley** appeared to read out in reverse order the winners of the Female Bore of the Year award.

"Third," he announced, "is the **Baroness Jay**, who confirmed her promise as winner of the 1999 Newcomer of the Year by maintaining a consistently high level of intense boredom in everything she did throughout the past 12 months.

"Second," he droned, "is **Ms Jennie Page**, whose almost Renaissance range of contributions to national boredom stretch from her successful stewardship as a director of Railtrack to her membership of the board of the Equitable Life non-insurance company and her supreme achievement as the mastermind of this very building in which we are sleeping."

LORD WINSTON

At this moment, a large section of the unisex Body Zone giant statue collapsed, crushing the somnolent occupants of Table 5, jointly-sponsored by Virgin Trains, GNER and Connex South-East, who had all been hoping to win the team award later in the ceremony.

"But the winner," yawned Mr Morley, "is that girl-next-door favourite of this and every year, **Grant Bovey**'s own personalised lottery win, **Ms Anthea Turnoff**."

The winsome winner mounted the stage, accompanied by several hundred heavily-armed minders from *OK!* magazine (prop. **Dirty Des**), who proceeded to beat up any members of the audience they suspected of having cameras.

As officials of the Environment Agency brought in large piles of sandbags to withstand the advancing tide, an impromptu pageant was staged in honour of the 100th birthday of **Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother**.

A detachment of the 17th/21st Wombles marched across the stage in wellingtons, led by **General Norman Wisdom** and **Major Lionel Blair**. They were accompanied by **Dame Vera Lynn** singing an anthology of wartime hits, including *There'll Be Floodwaters Over The Whole Of Dover* and *We'll Swim Again*.

EURO 2000

Few guests noticed as the pageant moved seamlessly into a re-enactment of the State Funeral of **Sir Reginald Kray**, starring **Dame Barbara Windsor** singing an anthology of Gangland Favourites, including the ever-popular *My Old Man's In A Dustbin*.

As guests were served with their dessert course of Nigella's Homemade M&S Vienetta Whirl, **Mr Stephen Redgrave** rowed on to announce the Newcomer of the Year category.

The BBC's Sports Personality of the Year then took the microphone to tell the audience "The judges had no hesitation in picking the youngest ever winner of this award, **Master Rocco Ciccione**, the most recent offspring of the legendary **Madonna**, winner of our Rock-Bore of the Year Awards for a record 17 times."

THE NICE TREATY

As the shy, newly-wed billionairess waded up to receive the award on behalf of baby Rocco, there were angry protests from a Ms **Cherie Booth** QC complaining that the award was a gross contravention of the human rights of her client, **Master Leo Blair**, who would be demanding £2 million in compensation for his "hurt feelings and loss of self-respect" in not being named "Baby Bore of the Year".

In an attempt to distract attention from these embarrassing scenes, a **Mr William Hague** then performed his astonishing feat of downing 14 pints of Yorkshire Ale and falling flat on his face.

The audience continued to snore in appreciation, as **Mr "Nasty Nick" Bateman** led on the entire team of Channel Four's smash-hit TV docu-drama "Ten Very Boring People In A House In East London", to announce the winner of this year's "Lifetime Boredom Award".

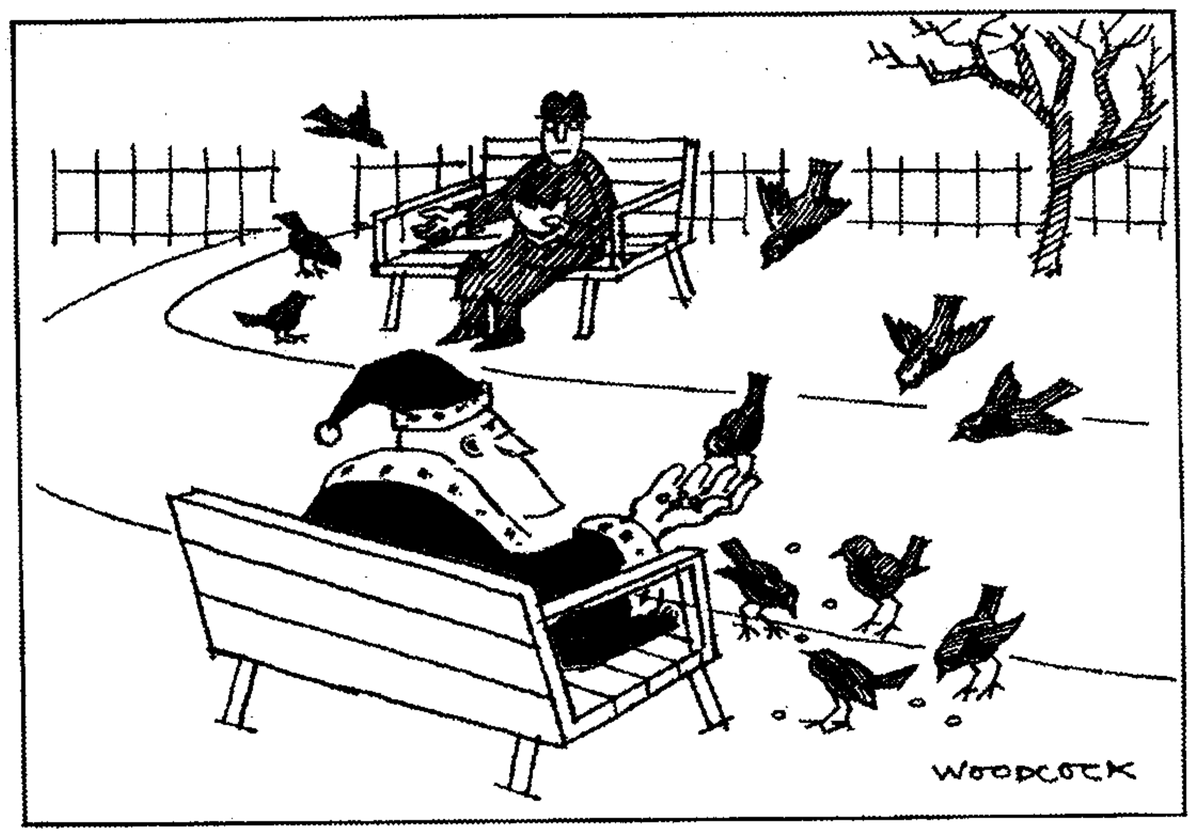
"And the winner is," chorused **Nick**, **Craig**, **Anna** and the other ones whose names we can't remember, "**Bore Vidal**, the American man of letters and cousin of Vice-President Al Bore".

As Mr Vidal prepared one of his celebrated chat-show anecdotes about how clever he is compared to anyone else in the world, the proceedings were interrupted by the entrance of a large yacht, *Chinese Gold II*, skippered by **Sir Edward Heath**.

"That's my award," shouted the red-faced former premier. "I'm going to take you to the European Court of Justice where I've got a lot of friends."

When yet more lawyers rushed on board to offer Sir Edward their services, the fragile bark slipped beneath the waves to the great amusement of **Baroness Thatcher**, who assumed command of the proceedings by reading out a tribute to her "very dear friend" **General Pinochet** for his achievement in making the trains of Chile run on time. "Which is more than can be said," she screamed, "for this ghastly little man Blair, since he so disloyally betrayed me, just like Portillo and all the others."

The former Supreme Ruler of the Universe continued in this vein for some hours, until the flood waters carried her away.



DOBSON FOR MAYOR

As the last surviving guests clambered onto the roof of the Dome, donning life-jackets specially designed for the ceremony in green PVC and artificial fox-fur by **Mr Alexander McQueenie** and **Ms Stella McArtschool**, the final award of the evening was hastily announced by megaphone from the nearby wobbly Millennium Bridge by **Monsieur P-Y. Gerbil**, the Dome's senior car park attendant.

"I 'ave ze grand pleasure to annoncer les winners du 'Posh 'n' Becks Most Boring Couple of the Year' trophy," he shouted.

"Ze short-list was originally ze long-list, as follows. **Liam et Patsy. Noel et Meg. Liz et Hugh. Richard et Judy. Michael et Zeta. Jennifer et Brad.** Et finalement, **Gordon et Sarah**, le Chancellor de l'Exchequer et son lovely bride.

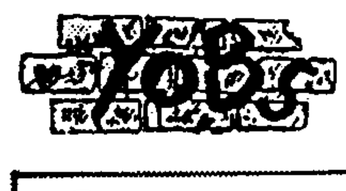
"Mais, très sadly, most of the above sont maintenant Boring Ex-Couples, which leaves as les clear winners **Monsieur et Madame Gordon Brown**."

Before the Iron Chancellor could abseil down from a circling helicopter to collect his trophy, a sobbing **Charles Moore** of the Daily Telegraph was heard angrily demanding a full official enquiry under the Lords Phillips, Saville and Macpherson, to investigate why **Miss Hurley** had not been given the award on her own, to justify putting her picture yet again on the front page of the Telegraph.

SVEN-GORAN ERIKSSON

At this juncture, the ever-rising waters of the River Thames finally closed over what remained of the Millennium Dome, sweeping away the few guests still alive and a large quantity of the following unwanted items, viz: hundreds of unpublished letters to the Times explaining why the new Millennium does not begin until January 1 2001; thousands of unsold tickets to Lord Archer's new play *I Am Guilty*; millions of copies of *My Self-Important Life* by Sir Paddy Pantsdown; tens of millions of copies of *Our Very Important Story* by the remaining members of the Beatles; hundreds of millions of *Our Very Important Number One Hit* CDs by the same; billions of *Down With Globalisation* Blair and Clinton plastic masks for use at meetings of the World Trade Organisation; trillions of T-shirts, mugs and keyrings bearing the legend *I Went To The Tate Modern And All I Got To See Was Some Lousy Art And Quite A Good View Of St Paul's*; and zillions of spoiled US election ballot papers inscribed *This is a 100% genuine vote for Al Bush*.

Rescue workers trying to reach any survivors before they were engulfed for ever by the cod-free waters of the North Sea were prevented from their errand of mercy by a convoy of haulage vehicles blocking all access points and shouting "Truck off Tony", before they themselves sank below the waves.



HUSBAND

The Gnome HAPPY

Amazing Time-Saver For The Busy Executive

The

NAZ-O-PEN™

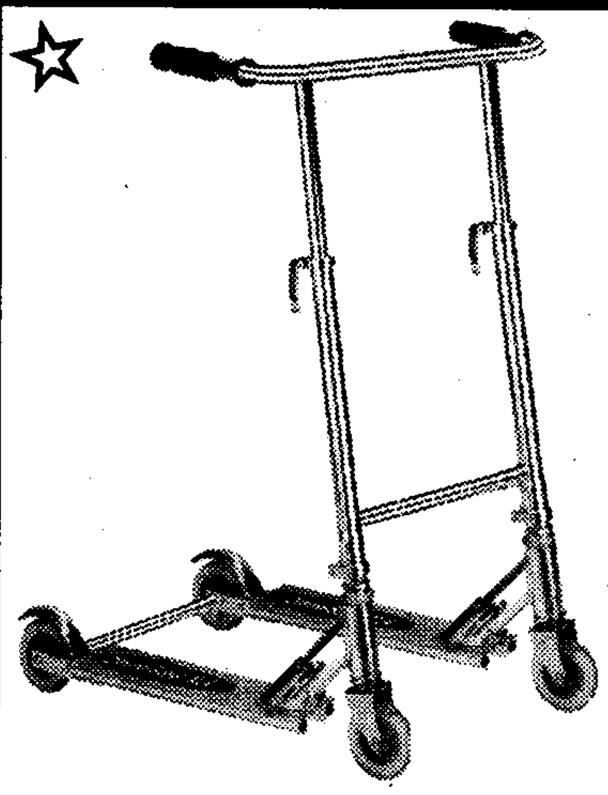
IT LOOKS like an ordinary pen but take off the end and *hey presto!* it's a nasal hair trimmer.

You can write that important memo and at the same time groom your nasal hair.

99p per dozen (batteries extra)
£395 each

● *Plays theme tune from "Walking With Dinosaurs".*

Who Says Oldies Can't Have Fun!



Don't be left out of the latest Christmas craze with the

Zimmo-Scoot XL4™

MADE from durable lighweight aluminium, this remarkable scooter folds away and fits neatly into your shopping basket.

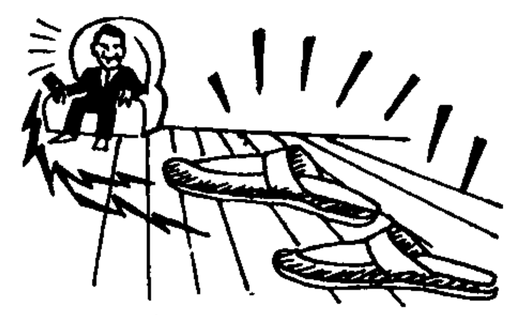
● Watch the teenagers gasp with envy as you scoot by them at 30 mph!

Price: £32.78
Colours: Heavy Metal, Hiho Silver, Charles Gray.

WARNING: Not to be used by anyone over 50.

Comfort Lovers!

ROBOSLIPS

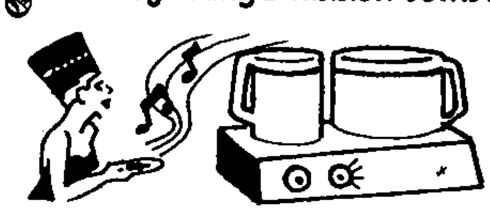


NO NEED for faithful Fido to bring you your cosy footwear with the incredible Robot Slippers from Tunisia.

All you have to do is select "Fetch" on your remote and "*Roboslips*" will do the rest!

PRICE: £2,174 (plus VAT)
RANGE: 250mm (EC Approved)

From the Age of Tutankhamun comes one of the great secrets from the Boy- King's hidden tomb.



THE PAPYRUS FOOD BLENDER

At last you can own a perfect reproduction of the machine that the mysterious Queen Nefertiti used to blend the King's royal repasts in 5,000BC.

Introductory offer: ***£790.99***

Plays theme tune from Peter Jay's "History of Money" TV show.

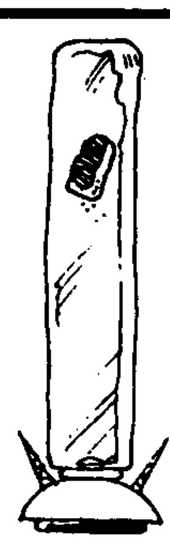
FIDOPHONE ONE-TO-ONE

AT LAST a mobile phone for your dog! Fits neatly onto Rover's collar so you can call him day or night! Lost in the park? Bring bring! And he's back. Also receives text messages.

PRICE: £35 *(Calls cost just 35p per second)*

Choice of Rings • J.S. Bach • Woofgang Mozart • Beethoven's 'Fidolio'.

★ ONE AMAZING SOUVENIR



THIS is *your* chance to own a genuine fragment of the historic Millennium Dome. This heirloom will be a priceless memento for you to treasure and pass on to your children and your children's children.

When future generations ask "What was the Dome like Grandpa?" *you* can actually show them.

Hurry now while stocks last!

£7,275.98 (plus p&p) per fragment

Coffee Lovers – Now At Last...

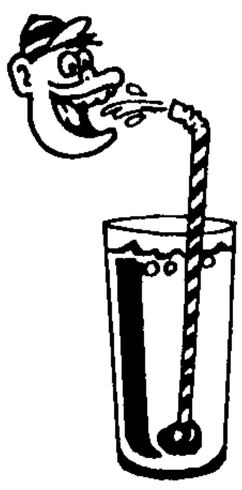
THE COMPLETE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF MODERN COFFEE

Essential reference for today's coffee drinker, this definitive 18 volume (or 2CD-ROM) beverage lexicon includes all the latest definitions with cross-reference and index-linking. So when you're offered "a tall, skinny, wet, vanilla top frapporetti with steamy wings to fly," you'll know exactly what you're getting!

Says TV's *CHARLES MOORE*, "This is the most important work of reference since the Domesday Book." **Price: £898 (or £897.99 via Amazon.com)**

NEW From Indonesia

THE AUTOMATIC STRAW™



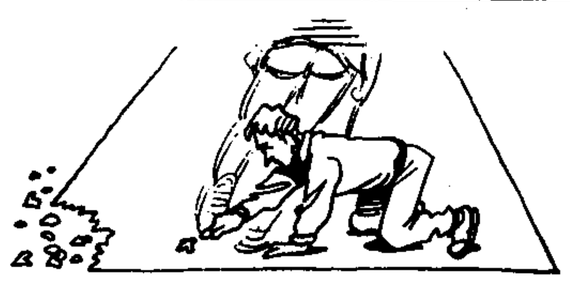
NO MORE wearisome sucking thanks to this wonder of mini hydraulic technology. Simply place the automatic straw in your favourite drink and the miracle micro-pump goes to work.

Kids will love it!

Says TV's CHRIS TARRANT
"It puts the fun back into my leisure drinks."

★ Price: £19.95 ★
Colours: Jack Straw, Simply Red, Conrad Black.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST EVER JIGSAW PUZZLE



★ Covers 2 acres and includes over 300 million pieces.

Years of fun for you and your descendants!

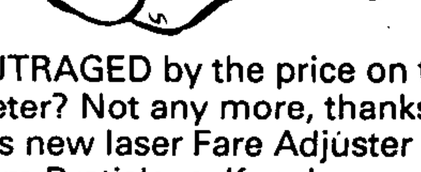
Delivered to your home by lorry.

PRICE: £8,742

CHOICE OF PICTURE: Constable's Haywain, Charles and Di Royal Wedding, Athena Tennis Player Scratching Bottom classic.

Taxi Lovers

THE FARE'S FAIR™



OUTRAGED by the price on the meter? Not any more, thanks to this new laser Fare Adjuster from Bratislava. Knocks pounds off the fare at the discreet press of a button. See cabbie's eyes pop out of his head as he can't believe what's on the clock!!

● ***Says London Mayor Ken Livingstone, "Vote for me!"***

Plays theme tune from Eastenders.

PRICE: £27,307 plus VAT

No More Scalding Tongue Or Freezing Teeth Misery with

THERMOSPOON

THE breakthrough in cutlery technology from Haiti makes you master of your own soup.

Too hot? Press button C.

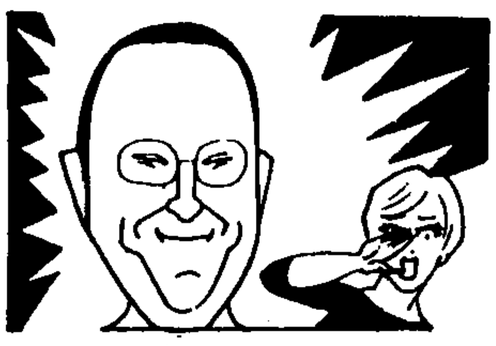
Too cold? Press button H. Hey presto! Soup's just right.

Mmmmm. Also works for: cornflakes, ice-cream, curry.

★ Plays theme tune from popular Channel 5 News.

Price: £98.28 (batteries not included)

HOLIDAY Mail Mart



Partygoers! Scare your friend with the slip-on life-like

RICHARD DESMOND Horror Mask!!

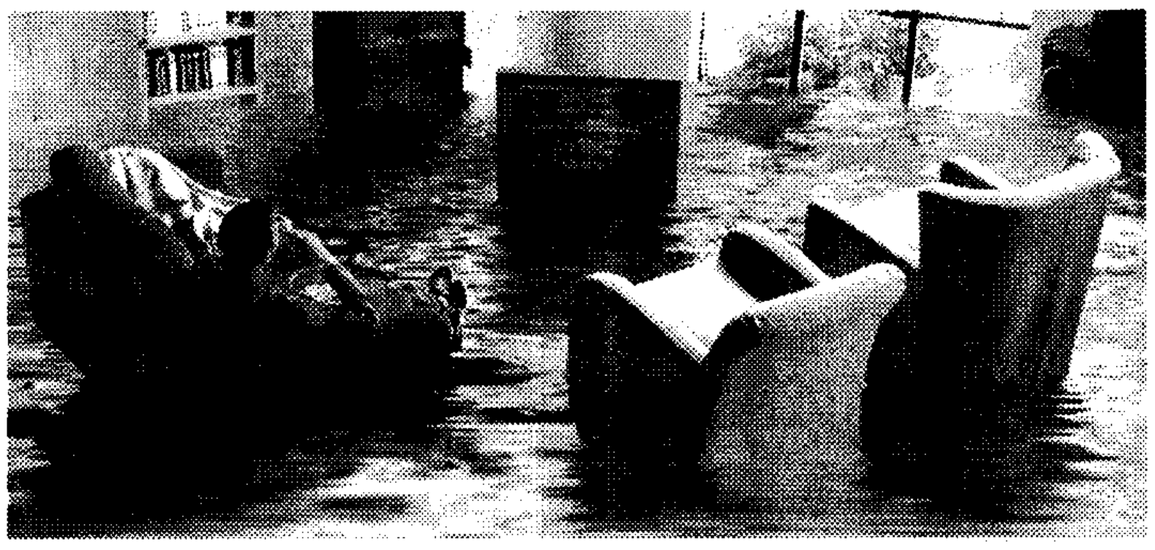
FELLOW guests will run a kilometre when they think the Emperor of Porn has arrived to snap their wives in the altogether!!!

Hours of harmless fun!!! *25p for packet of 6*

New From Bangladesh!!

Say Goodbye to Flood Misery with

SOFA-FLOAT



This incredible amphibious 3-piece suite and TV unit is designed to inflate automatically as floodwaters enter your living room. See your neighbours go green with envy as they struggle for survival while you and your loved ones continue to watch your favourite TV soaps in safety and comfort!!!

Price £2,461 million (VAT inc.)

BIRD LOVERS

AT LAST

THE BIRD JACUZZI

GIVE robin the bath-time of his life with this latest development in avian hydrotherapy! Just in from Lapland! Watch him smile with delight as the jet steam takes his bird cares away.

Suitable also for: Finch, Blue-tit, House Martin, Martin Amis.

■ *Plays theme tune from "Holby City".*

Price: £999.99

TRYING TO GIVE UP SMOKING?

At Last – A 100% Guaranteed Method With

NIC-O-LUME

LOOKS just like an ordinary lighter – but when you try and light up a cigarette – hey presto! Nothing happens. Fag's not lit – and *you're* not smoking!

Price: *99p per dozen.*
Colours: *Rabbi Blue, Charlotte Green, Willard White.*
Plays theme tune from TV's Cold Feet.

PEDESTRIANS walk safely with the Gnome WALK SAFE SYSTEM

SIMPLY apply indicators to the shoulders of your jacket or coat and you can signal to other pedestrians when you are turning left or right (or overtaking!). No more dangerous bumps or embarrassing collisions! An end to those "sorry-sorry-sorry" confrontations.

PRICE: 75p (per pair)
Solar-powered, hand-operated, velcro strips included.

Says TV's ***John Stalker****, "This is a major breakthrough in pavement safety."*

The Perfect Gift For The House Proud!

MIAOWCH!

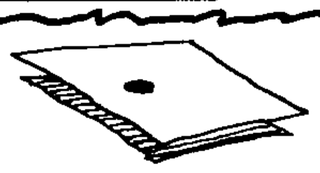
SAY goodbye to cat-scratched sofa and armchair misery! Just plug in the MIAOWCH to anything moggy likes to get his claws into and switch on.

ZAP *The 9,000 volts will teach pussy to put his paws somewhere else!*

Price: **£13.95** *(plug extra)*

Plays theme tune from Animal Hospital.

The Lucky Chad Of Florida

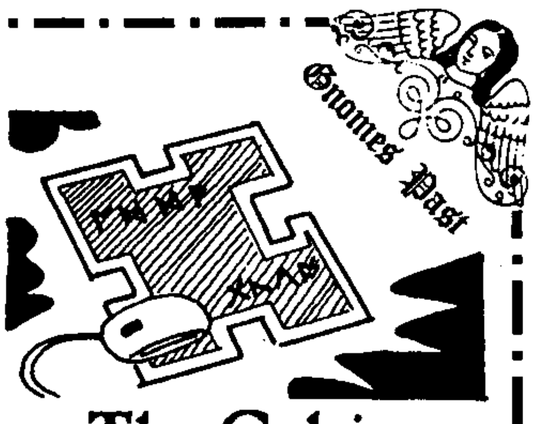


FOR hundreds of years Floridans have attributed their legendary longevity to the lucky charms of the mystic Chad.

It looks just like a piece of paper with a hole punched in it but this lucky totem guarantees you a lifetime of wealth, health and happiness.

● Each certificate comes with a guarantee of authenticity signed by Florida State Governor Hiram J. Bush (no relation).

Says GWB of ***Texas****, "Once I was a loser but now I'm the most powerful man in the world. All thanks to my lucky Chad."*



Gnomes Past

The Celtic MOUSE MAT

AN EXACT replica of the mouse mat used by monks in the 4th century in the Abbey of St Excite on the Island of Web. Made from genuine Ionian granite and decorated with authentic hand-carved runes from the Book of Jahu.

✻ Price: £7,432.99 EXCLUSIVE

New From NASA

GRAV-O-LUME

DEVELOPED by leading space scientists during the Jupiter landings this incredible luminous gravel is made from synthetically cloned Moon Rock. So now, when you are coming back late from a party there will be no more stumbling in the flower pot as grav-o-lume works its midnight magic!

PRICE: 99p per kilo

Warning: Protective clothing should be worn at all times

Say Goodbye to Cancer with the latest miracle in alternative medicine

"GNOMESENG"

(otherwise known as St Gnome's Wort)

FOR centuries the Aztec shamans of Ecuador have known the healing powers of the Gnomeseng root, found only in the Andes.

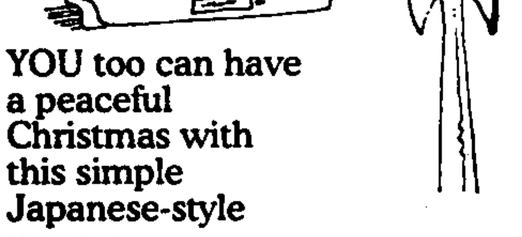
Now available for the first time in the UK in handy lozenge form. Thanks to Gnomeseng, you will never die!!

Says PRINCE CHARLES, "I honestly believe that alternative medicine has a lot to offer."

Write to Unit 54, Bracknell Trading Estate, Reading RE6 1XY.

Say Goodbye To Singing Fish Misery With The

GNOME HARPOON™



YOU too can have a peaceful Christmas with this simple Japanese-style weapon.

Kills all known singing fish dead!!

■ *Works for: Billy Bass, Timmy Trout, Larry Lobster, Sammy Sushi.*

Sings "Shaddapyourface" by Joe Dolci

Price: £74.39

DIARY

EUROPE: A CIVILISED EXCHANGE

Dear Frederick Forsyth, I find it tiresome that apparently intelligent people such as yourself can remain blind to the advantages of closer union with our European partners.

Anyone who knows anything about what is happening in Europe knows that it offers this country the greatest chance of peace and prosperity for the years ahead. It is simply irrational to suggest otherwise.

I am informed you are a thriller writer. Nevertheless, if you know about anything that is happening in the real world, you will know that the arguments for full economic union are unanswerable.

With very best wishes, Yours ever,
Sir Edward Heath

Dear Sir Edward, Thank you for your letter. In response to your initial query – yes, I am intelligent and not just "apparently" so.

And, yes, I do indeed know what is "happening in the real world".

Shall I tell you? Would you like to know about those patriotic fishermen on the east coast of our kingdom, forcibly castrated by ruthless squads of Spanish sea police, just because, like generations of Britons before them, they wished to catch a herring or two to prevent their wives and children from starving?

Would you like to know of Tom Smith, patriotic fifth generation sausage-maker from Burton-on-Trent, who was last week prevented by Brussels edict from including the tried-and-trusted centuries-old ingredient of springer spaniel in his Traditional Farmhouse Pork Bangers?

These are just two cases of the many millions of examples of untold misery the Euro-fanatics are causing to the men and women of this nation.

May I ask you to take a closer look at what is happening in – yes – the real world?

With best wishes, Yours ever,
Frederick Forsyth

Dear Mr Forsyth, Your letter has been passed on to me.

I imagine you have never been granted the opportunity to dine on many different occasions with such distinguished statesmen as Chancellor Helmut Kohl, President Giscard d'Estaing, Joschka Fischer or Commissioner Patten.

If you had done so, you would know that they are all highly impressive men of enormous character and international vision.

I remember dining with Giscard in the late 1970s. I was treated to an excellent selection of Burgundy – red and white – served in the very finest Waterford crystal. Such civilised interchange is the hallmark of the European Community.

It is only too easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day detail of exactly who wants what in his or her own little life. This we would never permit ourselves to do. Instead, we ate and drank and talked things over, determined to grow broader.

Fanatical? Let me assure you, Mr Fosdyke, there is nothing fanatical about getting the best deal for our country people in convivial circumstances among like-minded statesmen, who, I like to think, know a little more about what is going on than even your distinguished colleague the "sausage-maker"(!).

Yours sincerely, Sir Edward Heath

Dear Mr Heath, Thank you for your letter. As someone who is not ashamed to admit to loving this green and pleasant land, it pains me to stand helplessly by while you and your kind spit in the faces of the ordinary hard-working men and women of this ancient kingdom.

Decent, God-fearing men like basket-weaver Michael Prodd, who this week was forced to watch while his wife and children were tortured with sticks and put to death – and all because he refused to salute an image of faceless unelected Brussels gestapo boss Romano Prodi.

A few questions, Mr Heath.

What is to happen to much-loved Nelson's Column – ruthlessly earmarked for destruction in secret EC memos?

Or to Stonehenge – destined to be turned into hi-tech EC tax-collecting offices the moment this kingdom allows itself to be squashed by the Euro jackboot?

Answers, please, Mr Heath – or is your mouth too full of chewings from your latest fat-cat banquet?

Sincerely, Frederick Forsyth

Dear Mr Forsnip, Really, must you bother me with such obvious poppycock? Who are you, anyway?

Let me tell you something. Over a number of years, I came to know and like Chairman Mao Tse-Tung. He was one of the most civilised men I have ever encountered, with a fine collection of Chinese porcelain, and a ready sense of humour.

Yes, it took a great deal of effort and selfless determination on his part to silence his political opponents. But he had the sheer guts and energy to see the project through.

Mao and I saw eye-to-eye on many things. We were both internationalists, able to appreciate the bigger picture.

And you may not realise it but Mao was a dedicated supporter of the European Community.

Can you really tell me that Chairman Mao Tse-Tung, with his considerable experience of national and international politics behind him, was "wrong"? Of course you can't! So why not just shut up for a change, and leave these things to those of us who know better.

Sir Edward Heath

To Heath – Wipe that self-satisfied smirk off your face, you fat old queen.

I didn't die in the last war so that so-called men like you could sell my birthright for a mound of pottage and then frogmarch me into the gas ovens of a European federalist superstate, manacled to HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and other true patriots.

Okay. Go on then. Kill us if you must. But take it from me. You and your EC stormtroopers will never stop our British blood, turned red and blue on bangers and chips, from pulsing through our great British veins.

F. Forsyth, Patriot.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

THE ONE THING I HATE ABOUT LIVING IN THE COUNTRY IS THE SMALL-MINDED PROVINCIAL ATTITUDE OF THE PEOPLE..
I POPPED INTO THAT PUB FOR THE FIRST TIME LAST WEEK TO HAVE A COUPLE OF QUIET PINTS...
YEAH?
NEVER AGAIN! YOU WON'T BELIEVE THE REACTION I GOT FROM THE LOCALS!
I GOT COMPLETELY PISSED, BROKE A TABLE AND NOT ONE OF THEM RANG THE TABLOIDS!
THEY DON'T KNOW ANY BETTER, GARY...

Literary Review

Millennium Tomes

IT WAS the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the most optimistic of times, it was the most despondent of times. It was the most lavish of times, it was the most cheeseparing of times... Most conspicuously, 2000 brought some major literary casualties.

Anthony Powell died at 94, to be sneered at on grounds of snobbery by a great many people who had never opened one of his books. Malcolm Bradbury, whose decades-old reputation as the British literary establishment's supreme fixer and wire-puller went hand in hand with a genuine commitment to promoting literature and its younger practitioners, died at 68. Penelope Fitzgerald, possibly the greatest English lady novelist of the final quarter of the twentieth century, died at 83.

Other passings, equally regrettable, were corporate. The enlightened gentlemen at Transworld pulled the plug on their upmarket literary imprint Anchor, while Orion did the same to the fine old firm of Gollancz, whose colophon will narrowly survive to decorate half-a-dozen sci-fi titles a year. Other publishing shake-ups included Harper-Collins' purchase of independent 4th Estate simply so that, in the wake of Eddie Bell's departure, they could get their hands on its CEO Victoria Barnsley. Meanwhile, Messrs Waterstone once again demonstrated their solidarity with the country's small publishers by demanding discounts of up to 50 percent. The official description of this exercise was "professionalisation".

As for the books themselves, the usual ludicrous sums of money were thrown at items which unaccountably failed to meet the expectations vested in them.

Pride of place in this sorry catalogue perhaps belongs to Anthea Turner's memoirs, which even her publishers admitted had been a disaster. Up at the serious end of the market, the literary fiction lifetime achievement award — sorry, the Booker Prize — went to Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin;* the attention paid to Martin Amis's *Experience* and his dad's *Selected Letters of Kingsley Amis* confirmed Britlit's inability to shake off the influence of some elderly literary ghosts; and strenuous, if unsuccessful, efforts were made to convince us that old lags such as Julian Barnes (*Love, etc*) and Jeanette Winterson (*The Powerbook*) could still cut the mustard.

"Chick-fic" successes included Miss Jenny Colgan's *Amanda's Wedding* and Miss India *Knight's Life On A Plate.* In a particularly bad year for political memoirs, the first instalment of John Campbell's projected two-volume life of Margaret Thatcher eclipsed most of the competition. The year's best-selling book by a factor of umpteen to one was J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.* At one stage in the summer it was calculated that every fifth title sold in a British bookshop had come from the pen of the country's wealthiest one-parent family.

In 2001 we can expect all the trends outlined above to get worse: more money thrown at tripe; more pitiful celebrity memoirs (Macmillan has just paid half a million-plus for Bruce Forsyth); more "consolidation" in the megacorps.

Among other fine old imprints whose chances of survival look increasingly thin, one might mention Random House's Heinemann and Secker & Warburg. "Literary" novelists set to produce over the next few months including Jonathan Coe, David Lodge, Justin Cartwright, Hanif Kureishi and Margaret Drabble. There is a new le Carré in January — extracts already appearing — a new Nick Hornby in May, and presumably J.K. is at this minute slaving to produce tranche number five of what, *pace* Philip Hensher and Anthony Holden, is *the* publishing sensation of recent years. Elsewhere the chick-fic sponsors, keenly aware that the bottom may just be about to fall out of this particular market, nervously await the reception of expensively subsidised first works by the *Guardian*'s Emily Barr and Santa Montefiore.

What else? The e-novel phenomenon hasn't really worked: Stephen King's effort is now on hold, while Frederick Forsyth's attempt hasn't really set the Thames on fire. Online trade itself is still decidedly shaky, with Amazon's most recent figures showing income of $117m against outgoings of more than $500m. Basically, though, the book trade will go on peddling a single illusion — the illusion of choice. You might think the proliferation of book shops in our high streets was good for books and good for their purchasers. You would be wrong.

The big boys — Waterstone's, Books Etc and co — exist to sell a select number of top-line titles, offered to them at massive discount by a tiny group of "leading" publishers. You're a novelist of talent, shall we say, published by a small firm in Darlington. Well, let me tell you that no one — from the chief buyers at Waterstone's to the literary editor of the Sunday papers – gives a stuff. Depressing, isn't it?

Pseuds Corner

Two golden chances fell to Lee Hendrie but, indecisive as a voter with no more liking for Gush than Bore, he purveyed pregnant chads.

Jeremy Alexander, report on Aston Villa vs. Newcastle United, Guardian

The urgent call of the mobile left unanswered brings the condemnation of the disgruntled and the disconnected. Yet, like the cry of a baby, can raise an almost parental concern in those with phones of their own.

Telephony examines this emergent culture of the mobile phone ring-tone, and its inevitable effect on our psyche. Manipulating the ringing tones of 50 Siemens mobile phones, **Thomson & Craighead** create a contemporary symphony of digital noise. The phones are programmed to call each other, sparking a chain reaction of melodic fragments and familiar tunes from which a haunting cacophony emerges – recalling in part, the panic, the guilt and pain of the unanswered call.

Mobile Home gallery advertisement

The geometric foundation of the design is based upon a circular form, which makes reference to the Institution's global perspective and international reputation in teaching and research. The typographic elements demonstrate a hierarchy which promotes the importance of the location within the nomenclature. The group of circles represents the incremental growth of knowledge and experience and the progressive development of the University as an educational le... This thematic device continues through to the linear band on the right of the Shield of Arms and describes the cyclical movement of time, indicating progression and new directions.

University of Dundee Corporate Identity, 'Design Rationale'

October and November, during the wettest autumn on record, were the worst for 50 years and a catastrophe that affected most regions. To mark the event, *The Daily Telegraph* has published a large-format book containing 200 stunning colour photographs, with an introduction by W.F. Deedes.

Advertisement

CONTRIBUTORS: F.A. Cowburn, Anna Lomax, John Ezard, Anon., Peter J. Witchell, F. Knox.

£10 paid for entries

PSEUD OF THE YEAR (2nd time) Simon Barnes
PSEUD JOURNAL The Guardian (20 entries!)

Books & Bookmen

THOSE who thought the days when bookshops treated casual staff like dirt had died out with Christina Foyle are in for a shock: Borders, the supposedly touchy-feely coffee shop-obsessed US outfit, carries on the tradition.

One poverty-stricken seasonal temp, contracted to work six weeks over the Christmas period, was dismayed to learn that he would not be paid until the end of the first month in service.

However, at the job interview the bookseller had been told that an advance could be applied for at the end of the first week. When the temp came to fill in the reason for his request on the relevant form, it was explained that "rude" answers were not acceptable. Simple, honest responses such as "I'm skint" or "I'm hungry" were deemed by the paymasters to be "rude".

Only after jumping through the various hoops was the hapless bookseller told it was unlikely he would get any money that week, as applications had to be in on the previous day. "I then told them I hadn't eaten, to which came the reply 'That's not good'. End of interview," the temp told the *Eye.* "I asked my colleague in the café for a sandwich and referred him to the woman who had conducted the interview for payment."

For this act of chutzpah the casual was suspended without pay as a thief — no great surprise in a company so absurdly zealous in its searches of employees' bags it has been known to place a security clearance sticker on an externally-purchased banana.

'Bookworm'

LUVVIES

By day three, she [actress Drew Barrymore] had decided: "From now until next year, I'm going to take a picture of a tree every single day. I think this will be a wonderful experiment."

To help her face the challenge, she confides she used to talk to her index finger, where "husband-to-be" Tom Green had stuck a "magic plaster". He also had one. "We just had to touch or talk into our plaster any time we wanted to say something or feel each other," she says.

The *Daily Express* on a Charlie's Angels 'survival weekend' in the Utah desert.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"We've been invited to a Greco-Roman wrestling night at the Hodgkinsons'"

IN THE BACK

LOCKERBIE: CAMPBELL'S SOUP

HOW goes the trial in Holland of the two Libyan intelligence agents accused of bombing Pan-am airliner 103 over Lockerbie in December 1988? The short answer is that until 8 January it is not "going" at all.

For the second time in six months the trial has been adjourned while the defence waits for more detailed evidence from Syria about a possible bomber who is not Libyan and is not one of the accused. For the moment, the most dramatic moment in the trial was the motion from Richard Keen QC for the defence that his client, Al Amin Khalifa Fimah, has no case to answer.

The three judges listened in near silence as Mr Keen set out his formidable case. They were not so silent when Mr Alistair Campbell (no relation to the prime minister's press secretary, but the Scottish lord advocate depute and therefore a government minister) argued that the case against Fimah should continue.

The central points, he declared, were a) that "an unaccompanied bag was carried on Air Malta flight KM 180 between Luga Airport, Malta and Frankfurt"; b) that the bag was the brown Samsonite one containing the explosive which, after changing planes at Frankfurt and Heathrow, eventually blew the Pan-am flight and all its passengers to bits over Lockerbie; and c) that the man who played a crucial part in getting the bomb on the plane at Malta was Mr Fimah. Mr Campbell's difficulty was that there was hardly any evidence for any of these assertions.

First, did the bomb go on the Malta flight at all? Mr Campbell argued that there had been chaos at Luga airport that morning (21 December 1988), and that an unaccompanied suitcase had defied the baggage checking system and had been slipped on to the plane.

His first problem was pointed out to him rather sharply by Lord Maclean, one of the judges. The "chaos" at Luga airport had involved a Libyan airlines flight, not the Maltese flight to Frankfurt. The exchange went like this:

Lord Maclean: *You've mentioned Libyan airlines?*

Campbell: *Yes. I am coming on in a moment to describe the situation on the morning of the 21st December where a number of flights were checking in, one of which was a Libyan airlines flight.*

Maclean: *But the crown case is that the bag would have to be got onto the Air Malta flight.*

Campbell: *Indeed, my Lords, it would have to be tagged with an Air Malta tag for an Air Malta flight, but that's not to say it couldn't be introduced at the check-in where Libyan Arab Airlines were checking in, if the system was to be subverted.*

Maclean: *Remind me, is there evidence that you could check in an Air Malta bag, or a bag with an Air Malta tag on to a flight for Malta at Libyan Arab Airlines?*

Mr Campbell couldn't remind the judge of anything of the sort. All he could do was take a break and consult with his advisers. He then announced:

My Lords, what I am endeavouring to do is simply to identify possible routes into the system. I am not suggesting that the bag was introduced under a normal procedure. I am suggesting that Mr Fimah must have taken advantage of his being known at the airport to introduce a bag into the system rather than formally check it in.

Maclean: *It is accepted, though, that there is no evidence that Fimah was seen at the airport on the 21st of December.*

Campbell: *I accept that. It's a matter of inference.*

Almost at once, Mr Campbell was interrupted

Scottish judges: Lords Coulsfield, Sutherland and Maclean

again on the same subject, this time by the presiding judge Lord Sutherland.

Sutherland: *I'm sorry to interrupt you, Advocate Depute. You are departing from your possible route, are you?*

Campbell: *Yes, I am illustrating the possibilities of the system being accessed either at the check-in or at some point airside.*

Sutherland: *Yes. But either of the two routes you've postulated would still have to go through the reconciliation process which appears from the evidence at Luga to have been fairly good.*

Mr Campbell had to take another break, and get more advice. Then he said:

Yes, my Lords, I am just confirming that my recollection of the evidence was that the reconciliation between passenger and bags was only applied on the route to Cairo and not to Air Malta flights to Frankfurt.

Sutherland: *Well, there was at least a reconciliation between the number of bags checked in and the number of bags loaded on to the aircraft. The loadmaster did his actual count, checked that his figure agreed with the check-in figure, and both arrived at the number 55, as I recall it.*

Alistair Campbell QC

All Mr Campbell could say was that these "figures could not be relied upon". Then Lord Sutherland raised the further difficulty of the danger to any conspirator that the count of luggage on the plane might expose the fact that there was a bag not accounted for; that the bag might be taken out of the system, and inspected, to the frustration of the entire bombing conspiracy not to say the prompt arrest of the conspirators.

Mr Campbell replied:

Campbell: *I take your Lordship's point. That of course confirms the need for somebody with access beyond the public area, and that if the system was to be subverted it would require somebody with the sort of access and experience that Mr Fimah had to subvert the system.*

This was too much for the third judge, Lord Coulsfield, who interrupted the wretched Campbell for the third time:

Coulsfield: *But since we don't know how the system was subverted, what is the basis for inferring that it was Mr Fimah, rather than somebody else, like a loader who had been bribed, who actually subverted it?*

Campbell: *I take from the evidence of this whole chapter of days, taken as a whole, that Mr Fimah has been recruited by Mr Megrahi, his friend, to assist him.*

Coulsfield: *But I think this is open to the objection I was putting to your argument earlier, that you are tending to assume that Mr Fimah is involved, when that is the very thing that has to be inferred from the evidence: that he was involved knowingly.*

Campbell: *What I am endeavouring to do is to outline the facts as to what he did along with Mr Megrahi. And from these facts taken as a whole, my submission is, the inference is that he (Fimah) assisted with this bag and must have known what the purpose of the exercise was.*

Coulsfield: *But there is no evidence to indicate that the defeating of the system at Malta Airport was something that Mr Fimah even was in a position to do because the furthest that the evidence goes, as I understand it, is to indicate that on previous occasions he may have been able to put a bag on to the computer, on to the conveyor belt.*

There was no intelligible answer to that. There was indeed no evidence that the baggage system was subverted at Luga airport. All the bags were counted as they went on to the plane. They corresponded with the bags that were checked in. The only evidence that an unaccompanied bag went on the flight from Malta was a computer print-out at Frankfurt which showed that an unaccompanied bag went on the Pan-am flight to London at Frankfurt; and that the timing of the arrival of this bag meant that it could conceivably have come from the Malta flight. All this evidence was entirely hypothetical. It did not even start to prove that the bomb went on at Malta, and certainly not that Mr Fimah put it there.

"What your Lordships are being asked to do at this stage," said Mr Keen as he summed up, "is to infer that a man who wasn't there did, by a means they did not know, smuggle a bomb on to a plane at Luga Airport". Mr Campbell and his associates had, he argued, conspicuously failed to make out even the semblance of a case against Mr Fimah.

On 29 November, the judges decided nevertheless to allow the case against Fimah to continue. Lord Sutherland was careful to clarify that in rejecting the "no case to answer" submission the judges had to take the crown case "at its highest". He added: "And such matters as assessment of credibility and reliability of witnesses and assessment of what inferences should be drawn from such evidence as survives the test of credibility and reliability play no part whatever." The judges, in other words, were not assessing the credibility or reliability of the evidence. Their test was simply: does the untested evidence add up to a case to answer? Yes, it did – just.

One piece of evidence against Mr Fimah were the entries in his diary which refer more than once to the need to "get tags" from Air Malta. Mr Campbell surmised that the only reason to get the tags was to get a case with a bomb in it on an aircraft. No doubt Mr Fimah or his lawyers will tell the court what other use he could have had for such tags (he was, after all, about to set up his own airline).

What may be even more helpful to the defence was the judge's use of the word "crucially" to describe the evidence of Giaka, the former Libyan intelligence agent, garage mechanic and wig specialist who defected to the American CIA long before the bombing but only remembered the (alleged) involvement of Megrahi and Fimah several months after the bombing (see *Eye* 1012). As Lord Sutherland's statement made clear, the judges were leaving an assessment of Giaka's "crucial" (if imaginative) evidence to their final verdict.

BRAND LOYALTY AT BA

BRITISH AIRWAYS is still smarting after its attempt to swipe the surplus on its older pensioners' fund (APS) was thwarted by the pensioners and the trustees (*Eye* 1012).

BA bosses refuse to take the defeat gracefully; and with the help of their supporters among the trustees and in the fund, some of whom are on the BA payroll, they are seeking some other way of getting their fingers on the billion pound surplus.

An important date will be 31 March 2001 when Captain Terry Brand comes to the end of his term as BA pensioner-elected trustee. Captain Brand was a supporter of the former BA effort to merge its two pension funds, and he refused to resign when active members of the old scheme passed (by a huge majority) a vote of no confidence in the member-elected trustees.

Nominations are being sought for a new trustee to continue to oppose the merger or any other scheme by BA to swipe the pensioners' money.

DO-THEY-CARE HOME?

STEPHEN HILL, though paralysed from the waist down through spina bifida, was optimistic about his future when he advertised for a penpal and girlfriend. But just a few days after he wrote his CV – "Easy going, caring, good sense of humour. I'm fit, active and mobile in my chair" – 25-year-old Stephen was dead.

In the care home run by the Shaftesbury Society where he lived in term time, Stephen had – undetected by medical staff – developed pneumonia. When it was noticed that he had serious breathing difficulties, a nurse was summoned, but not an ambulance. She took 10 minutes to arrive and then decided not to resuscitate. Three minutes later he died.

The astonishing admission the nurse later made was that she did not consider resuscitation because of the "nature of Stephen's physical disabilities and the suddenness of his death". She had used her professional judgement and decided "it was not possible".

For his family, who had been told by phone less than an hour earlier that Stephen had tonsilitis, his unexpected death was devastating. They have spent the last five years trying – and failing – to get the nurse's decision not to apply normal emergency resuscitation procedures to Stephen condemned.

But they have just received another blow. Last month, at the end of a 20-month investigation into Staffordshire and Bedfordshire county councils (the local authorities responsible for Stephen and his residential home), the local ombudsman, a Mr J.R. White, has curiously concluded: "Staff would have sought whatever help was available in an emergency and I cannot lay blame on the nurse for responding to the emergency and exercising her own professional judgement about what she could best do to help."

Yet no one dialled 999, no one called a doctor until after Stephen's death and there was no Do Not Resuscitate order.

A letter from the British Medical Association, written after Stephen's death in response to his mother, Ann, said that unless a client said otherwise, "it would normally be expected that all efforts would be made to revive patients who suffer a cardiac or respiratory failure in their own home or in residential facilities. Obviously, people with disabilities are entitled to the same standards of medical care when they need it as any other patient."

And a letter from Healthpoint, an NHS ambulance trust, said: "Senior nurses have confirmed that no decision on resuscitation should have been made by a nurse acting alone, unless there was guidance in the notes."

Yet two investigations led by Staffordshire social services did not find fault with the nurse and concluded that they were not, in any event, responsible for her actions. As the home was not registered with the health authority and no protest could be lodged there, the family was forced to complain to the nurses' professional body, the UKCC. After a preliminary inquiry, a curt, standard reply said it had decided to take no further action because it was "unlikely to result in the removal of the nurse from the register".

Since Stephen's death in 1995 the UKCC has drawn up formal guidance on resuscitation, which makes clear that responsibility lies with a doctor – not a nurse.

Stephen's death also raises worrying questions about his medical care before he needed resuscitation. The Hill family have fought for five years to obtain Stephen's medical records (even now they have only been granted sight of them, not a copy) and found them remarkably lacking in detail. They have never been able to obtain details of Stephen's care contract.

Vomiting and complaining of neck pains, on the day of his death Stephen had seen two GPs. The first thought he had a urine infection; the second a throat infection. They prescribed antibiotics and recommended he be "observed constantly". The ombudsman has swept aside concerns about how the GPs' advice was followed; Mrs Hill hopes to take his report to judicial review.

She told the *Eye*: "There was a misdiagnosis, a delay in medication and then a nurse took an unauthorized decision not to try to resuscitate my son because of his 'physical disabilities'. And no one cares. Stephen's disabilities were not devastating. Hospital reports said how well he was doing. He had a full life, loved sports, music and going to the pub. You have to ask whether the same criteria would have applied to a 'normal' 25 year old diagnosed with a throat infection? And you have to conclude Stephen was never given a chance."

GRAY'S ELEGY

WORKERS at the now defunct Capper Pass tin smelter in Humberside, who for years have been fighting owner Rio Tinto for compensation for the damage they believe the plant wreaked on their health (see *Eyes passim*), hoped for a fitting tribute to one of their leading campaigners, Arthur Gray, when he died at the end of last month. But they had reckoned without that great defender of the working man, John Prescott.

After years of insisting that operations at the smelter had been in accordance with all relevant health and safety regulations, the mining multinational admitted last year that it had in fact breached the rules. Under mounting parliamentary and media pressure, the company agreed not to contest liability and to negotiate compensation at a special forum set up in collaboration with the claimants' solicitor, David Russell.

Parliamentary support for the claimants has been spearheaded by Kevin McNamara, MP for Hull West, who earlier this month drafted a series of early day motions (EDMs) on Capper Pass. One was a tribute to Gray, who had died a few days earlier, hailing his "tenacity and diligence in leading the campaign for justice on behalf of over 300 former workers and residents who had suffered illness or death", offering condolences to his widow, Edith, and calling on Rio Tinto "to reflect upon Arthur's death, to relinquish its obstructive tactics and to pay compensation forthwith".

Out of courtesy McNamara passed the draft EDM to John Prescott, who was Gray's MP. At this

stage, for reasons as yet unknown, the deputy prime minister refused to approve the motion. Gray's son Michael was so outraged by this he tipped off the local paper, the *Yorkshire Post*, which reported Prescott's decision. Two Jags blew his top and decided, quite wrongly, that Gray's solicitor, Russell, had leaked the embarrassing tale to the media.

On 8 December the deputy PM called Russell to complain. "What'ya yacking about?" he snapped, beside himself with rage. Russell, who is senior regional solicitor for the TGWU and a widely respected figure in Labour circles, was astonished to find himself being addressed as "Sonny boy". A fierce 30 minute argument between the two ensued until Prescott slammed the phone down.

The campaigners are now seeking to arrange a tribute to Gray in the House of Lords. Meanwhile his son has written to Prescott condemning "the appalling way in which you decided to veto the early day motion" and remembering bitterly: "My father, when he was alive used to vote for you because he though you championed working men's causes." While the government has not yet seen fit to honour Arthur Gray for standing up for the rights of himself and his colleagues, the executive chairman of Rio Tinto, Sir Robert Wilson, was duly given a gong in the new year 2000 honours' list.

POLICE 5

NO WONDER the police are in such a mess. Not only do they spend an inordinate amount of time investigating each other, but no sooner have they recruited a bright young graduate than they make his life such hell he has to leave the force.

That at least is the experience of Oxford Brookes University graduate Richard Sturt, who fell foul of Surrey police.

Two years after joining, PC Sturt was recommended for fast-track promotion. He passed his sergeant's exams with flying colours and was studying for an MSc in criminal justice studies at Portsmouth university in his own time. In March 1999, as part of this course he applied to spend some time with the Australian police to compare legislation there with our own PACE (police and criminal evidence act).

One week later, on 24 March, he was involved in an operation at Stoke College in Guildford, where he arrested a man and was asked by the sergeant in charge to interview him on the spot. Aware that this was against PACE regulations, Sturt refused.

The next day a female suspect attended Guildford police station in connection with the operation. After seeking advice from the custody sergeant on duty, Sturt arrested and interviewed her. All of a sudden he was hauled up before the area inspector and charged with three disciplinary offences: not having his pocket notebook at the time of the operation, disobedience to orders and lying in the custody suite, because he had said that to the best of his knowledge the woman had not yet been interviewed, when in fact she had. Sturt sought help from the Police Federation which gave him full backing.

In May 1999 he was interviewed by DCI Boon from Surrey complaints and discipline department, who told Sturt he had several witnesses who had heard him lying. DCI Boon gave Sturt a transcript of the custody video which appeared to show him in a very bad light. Sturt requested a copy of the video, which he got in July. The video told quite a different story to DCI Boon's heavily edited transcript. It showed that the custody sergeant knew it would have been acceptable for Sturt simply to caution the woman and release her.

A few days after Sturt received the video, his disciplinary hearing was cancelled. He was admonished for not carrying his notebook and not following orders; but the more serious charge of falsehood was dropped.

In September 1999 Sturt complained about the way Surrey had handled the investigation. At the same time he went on sick leave with stress, before eventually deciding to quit. The complaint went to acting deputy chief constable Peter Fahy, who appointed a Det Supt Rocket to investigate. As head of the professional standards department, DS Rocket was Boon's line manager, which was a clear breach of professional guidelines. It was eventually agreed the investigation would be conducted by a Supt Rogers from Mole Valley police.

On 20 October 2000 Fahy finally wrote to Sturt apologising "for the failure in the investigation against you". He conceded: "Superintendent Rogers makes it clear that in respect of the custody area video, the action taken by DCI Boon was below that which he would expect in an investigation of this seriousness." He promised to write to Sturt concerning whatever action he decided to take against Boon, who in the meantime had moved from complaints and discipline to become chief inspector at Farnham.

He added: "I am genuinely sorry at the way events have turned out in your case. You will recall that I gave you particular encouragement when you joined the force and I felt that you had great potential." No disciplinary action has been taken against the custody sergeant and area inspector whose actions led to Sturt being charged in the first place.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

EQUITABLE LIFE is a more flagrant example of mis-selling than even those involving the original private pensions and, more recently, endowment mortgages. But unlike in those instances, Equitable seems unable or unwilling to compensate the victims.

That could create a situation (last seen in Barlow Clowes exactly 12 years ago) where the government may have to pay the huge compensation bill. Not because it is the rescuer of last resort, but because, just as its appointed watchdogs failed to spot and stop conman Peter Clowes walking off with pensioners' life savings, so Whitehall and City regulators failed to act on evidence before them and their own suspicions.

Instead, just as with Barlow Clowes, the DTI then the treasury, the successor in insurance regulation, and finally its supposedly all-seeing, all-knowing creation, the Financial Services Authority, allowed themselves to be lulled into believing the same wishful-thinking as the hubris-filled Equitable directors.

The result? More than one million voters in an election year plus their families face an uncertain and less profitable future for their existing and particularly potential pensions, or a guaranteed 10 percent cut in their pension funds if they head for the door.

With Barlow Clowes, the DTI and the Thatcher government, like the FSA and Labour treasury ministers, first denied blame, but then were forced to take responsibility. A certain T. Blair attacked the DTI for "incompetence and gullibility" and insisted the Tories had to help.

Barlow Clowes' 15,000 victims cost the government £155m. The bill both financially and politically from the Equitable fall-out could be far greater. Equitable received more than £2bn in new premiums during 1999 alone, plus maybe another £1bn this year. The class of 2000 were mis-sold to if not deceived.

If in November 1998, as a leaked treasury memo shows, the top civil servant in charge of insurance companies had "serious questions" about Equitable's solvency because of the guaranteed annuities rates liability and found the information from the company "unconvincing", then what happened since requires a lot of explaining. First by the DTI, which seemingly sat silent up to 1997 while Equitable built the £1.5bn bomb in its balance sheet which, when it exploded this year, blew away the world's oldest mutual insurer. Second by the treasury, and lastly by the FSA, which took over in 1999.

The line from the treasury and FSA is that they raised their concerns with Equitable but were reassured. How? By whom? With what? How *can* you be reassured by those whose information is "unconvincing"? What further questions were raised either by the FSA or the treasury as the guaranteed annuity saga unfolded in court during 1999 and this year? What discussions were held, between whom and with what result, after the court of appeal began the countdown last January by ruling that Equitable had to pay up on its guarantees? Did the FSA simply accept Equitable's February claim to policyholders that there would be "no significant costs"?

Confirmation of the appeal court decision by the law lords in July clearly made Equitable technically insolvent. Those with knowledge of the company say insiders knew that was the downside and admitted as such in coded terms during the case. Yet still the FSA and treasury did nothing. Even worse, they allowed Equitable to continue to advertise heavily for new business, suckering in thousands of new victims. New money was needed of course to help pay old liabilities.

The FSA "explanation" was that it still believed Equitable's numbers and accepted that unless it continued to write new business it would not find a buyer which it was convinced would happen!

But both regulator and government stood by as one by one every potential buyer/rescuer walked away until there was only the man from the Pru... and even he refused to take over what was now a £3bn and growing black hole thanks to falling stock markets and new DTI-imposed accounting rules which fired another torpedo into the badly holed Equitable balance sheet without the DTI or FSA noticing.

What discussions went on between the FSA and Equitable and between the FSA and the treasury after the law lords' ruling and during the failed rescue negotiations? Why did the FSA not itself go into Equitable and check the reasons rival insurers were not prepared to acquire a supposed jewel of the British financial services industry? Why did the FSA not order an independent audit of Equitable given its inability to calculate or admit to the true guaranteed annuity liability and the fact that even after denying seven months' bonus to policyholders to cover that same bill it still needed to be rescued?

Why did the FSA not see that the relentless Equitable advertising for new business had to be mis-selling given the undisclosed fact that the company was entirely dependent on fast disappearing rescuers to survive to survive? Ads even appeared in newspapers the day *after* Equitable closed its doors to new business! Were there no discussions within the FSA or Whitehall or with Equitable about what if – as happened – there was no rescue? Did the treasury not discuss with the FSA, the Bank of England and the insurance/pension industry an enforced bail-out? If not, why not?

Did not the dear leader and the iron chancellor consider the damage an Equitable scandal could do to their flagship stakeholder pensions due to be rolled out in April? Did they think it was just a nightmare which would somehow go away – part of the risks of free enterprise which "new" Labour so loves?

How easy will it be now to encourage blue collar savers to provide for themselves after reading how the Labour government, architect of new improved post-Maxwell City regulation and pension provision, left one million largely white collar savers to the mercy of incompetent if not mendacious suits?

Faced by the leaked treasury memo and growing public outcry, the FSA's ever more self-important, government-appointed City czar Sir Howard Davies, a man with little or no previous experience of financial regulation, suddenly conceded there was a need to review its failure to act and the actions of the Equitable management. If Barlow Clowes, BCCI and Barings are any guide, this internal inquiry will be a whitewash as far as the FSA is concerned.

However, it seems increasingly likely that Equitable and the FSA plus the treasury and possibly the DTI will end up enjoined in a class action brought by Equitable policyholders. Further leaks and disclosures from a possible commons select committee probe and even the FSA internal inquiry are certain to provide further ammunition. There is even evidence of possible criminal offences in the developing Equitable scandal in relation to breaches of company law by the Equitable directors and its auditors Ernst & Young, who could well find themselves a deep pocket target of Equitable policyholders just as they have over BCCI.

Those with knowledge of Equitable's inner workings believe the true danger of the guaranteed annuity problem was known for years by former actuaries and managers who kept this from the present board. Any investigation of Equitable by the FSA or the Commons must obtain all the internal documentation which explains the full story of how the insurer got itself into such a suicidal mess and shows who knew what when. If – as is suggested – there has been a cover-up, those responsible should be identified.

The potential companies act problems for the present board led by president John Sclater – who, like chief executive Alan Nash, should have resigned long ago but continues to show the out of touch arrogance which contributed to Equitable's downfall – are to be found in the mutual's accounts for 1999 if not before.

Under company law Sclater and his colleagues, who include Jennie Page and Peter Davis, who "distinguished" themselves at the Dome and the National Lottery respectively, are responsible for selecting "suitable accounting policies", making "judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent" and following "applicable accounting standards". They are also "responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group". Sclater & Co were said to have "complied" with these legal requirements.

Ernst & Young in turn declared that they had obtained "all the information and explanations which we considered necessary in order to provide us with sufficient evidence to give reasonable assurance that the accounts are free from material mis-statement". As a result the auditors stated the 1999 accounts gave the famous "true and fair view of the state of affairs".

Yet that relied on the estimate by Sclater & Co that the additional guaranteed annuity bill was "unlikely to exceed £50m". Despite that hopelessly flawed forecast they still provided a further £200m to cover "more extreme future changes in financial conditions"!

That was what policyholders were told last April after the court of appeal setback and continued to be told until the law lords ruling suddenly revealed the true cost was £1.5bn and a rescue or closure.

Any Equitable policyholder who was persuaded to invest after those accounts, and certainly all of those sold pensions since July, were the victims of deliberate mis-selling by a company whose directors knew or should have known they could not deliver on its promises. That's an inEquitable lie.

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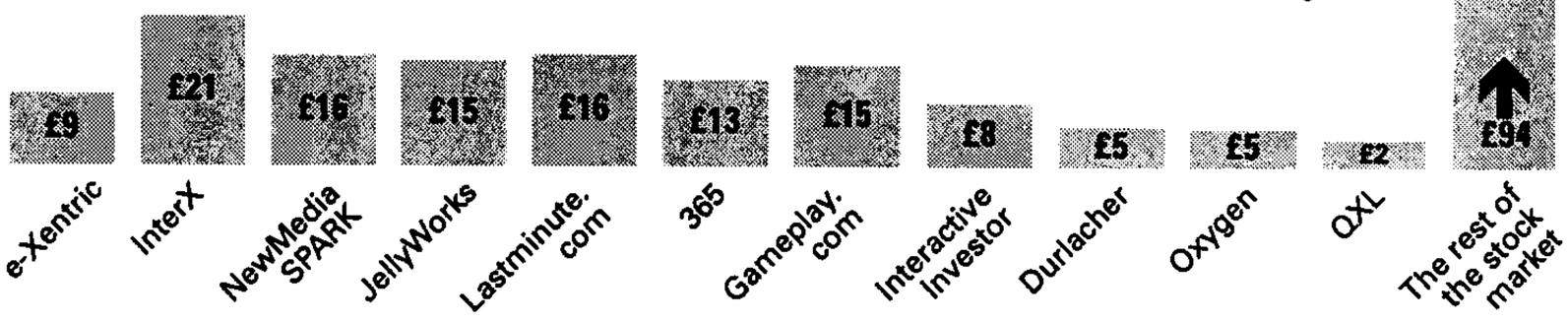

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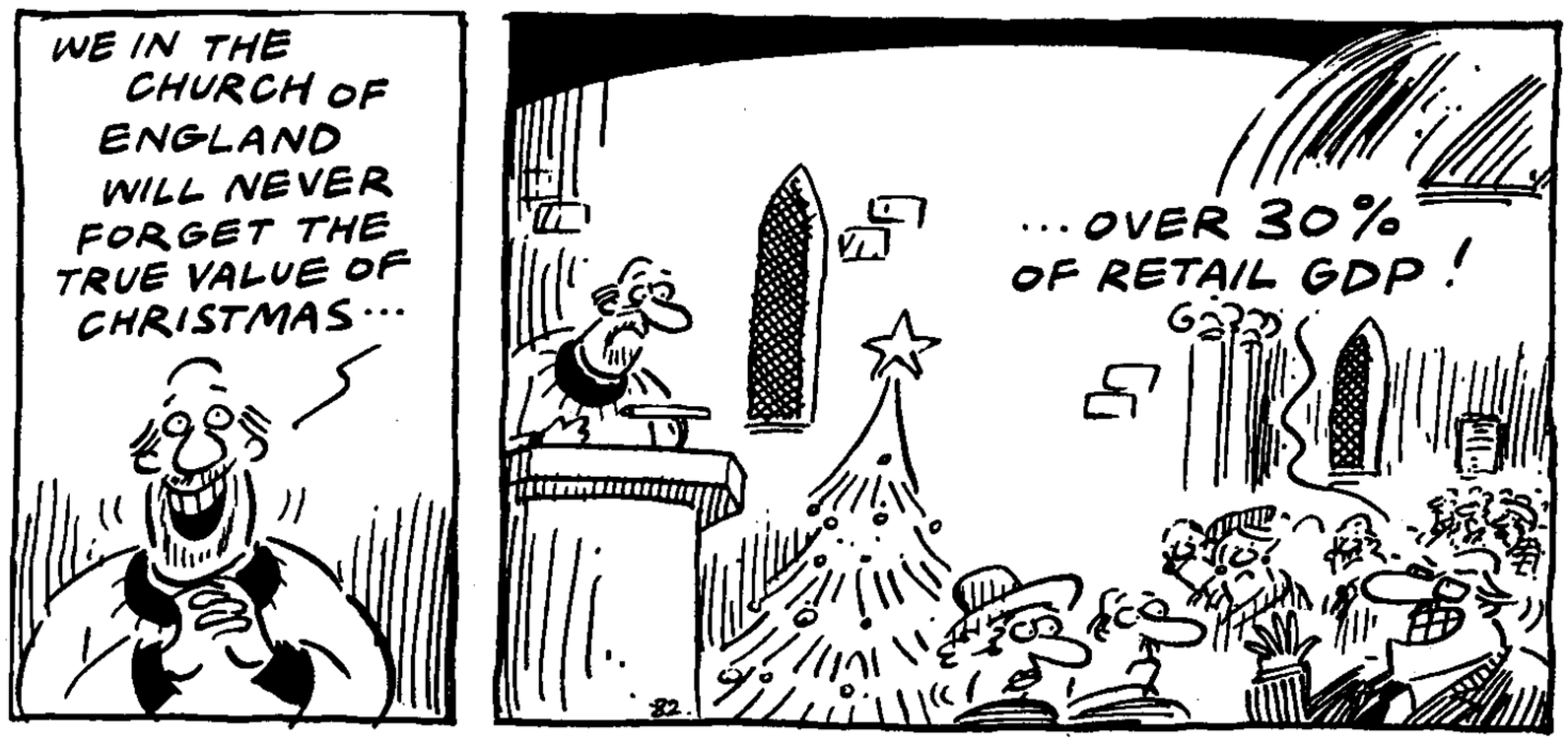

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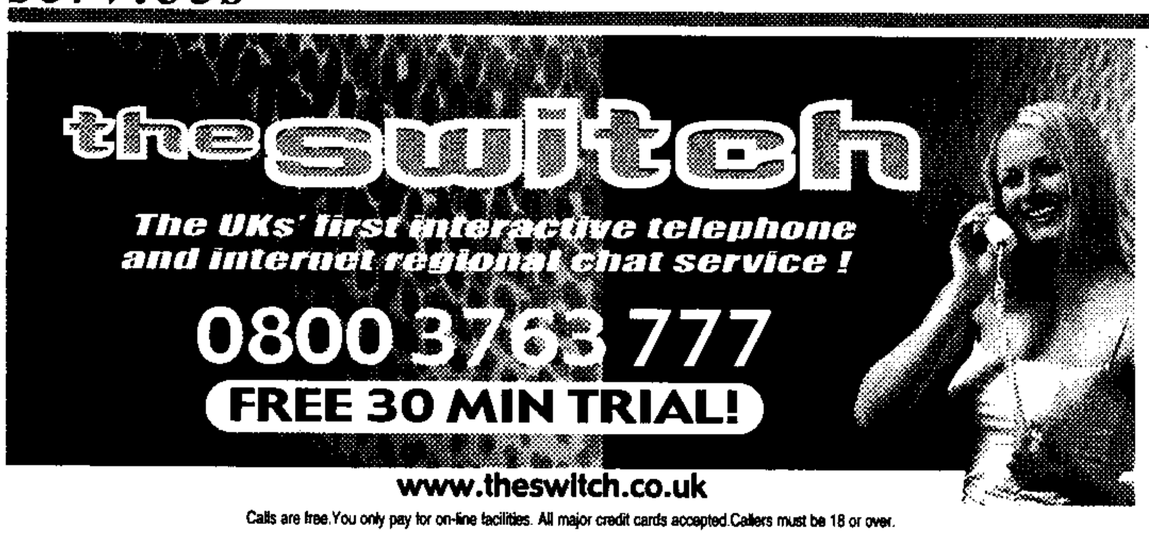
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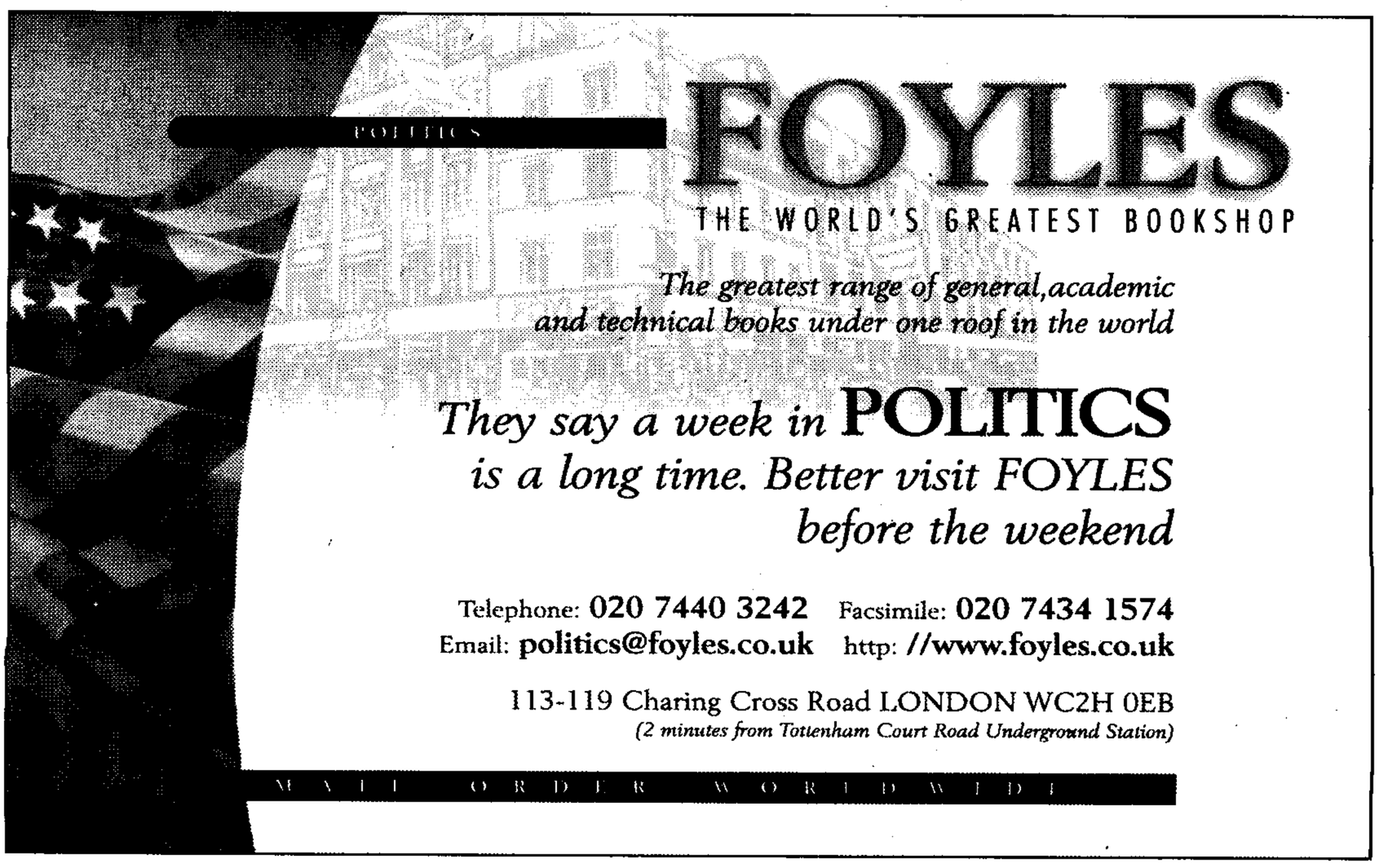
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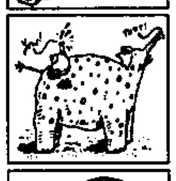

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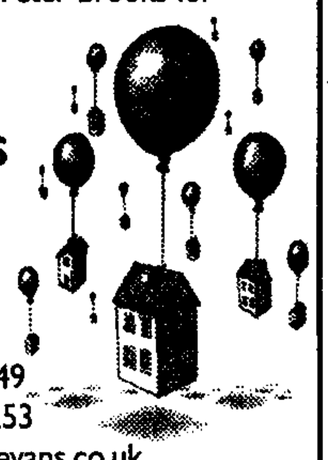

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